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JOHN MARCHMONT'S LEGACY.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET,"

ETC. ETC. ETC.

2360

M. E. Braddon

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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JOHN MARCHMONT'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER I.

MARY'S LETTER.

It was past twelve o'clock when Edward Arundel strolled into the dining-room. The windows were open, and the scent of the mignionette upon the terrace was blown in upon the warm summer breeze.

Mrs. Marchmont was sitting at one end of the long table, reading a newspaper. She looked up as Edward entered the room. She was pale, but not much paler than usual. The feverish light had faded out of her eyes, and they looked dim and heavy.

"Good morning, Livy," the young man said. "Mary is not up yet, I suppose?"

"I believe not."

"Poor little girl! A long rest will do her good

after her first ball. How pretty and fairy-like she looked in her white gauze dress, and with that circlet of pearls round her hair! Your taste, I suppose, Olivia? She looked like a snow-drop among all the other gaudy flowers,—the roses and tiger-lilies, and peonies and dahlias. That eldest Miss Hickman is handsome, but she's so terribly conscious of her attractions. That little girl from Swampington with the black ringlets is rather pretty; and Laura Filmer is a jolly, dashing girl; she looks you full in the face, and talks to you about hunting with as much gusto as an old whipper-in. I don't think much of Major Hawley's three tall sandy-haired daughters; but Fred Hawley's a capital fellow: it's a pity he's a civilian. In short, my dear Olivia, take it altogether, I think your ball was a success, and I hope you'll give us another in the hunting-season."

Mrs. Marchmont did not condescend to reply to her cousin's meaningless rattle. She sighed wearily, and began to fill the tea-pot from the old-fashioned silver urn. Edward loitered in one of the windows, whistling to a peacock that was stalking solemnly backwards and forwards upon the stone balustrade.

"I should like to drive you and Mary down to

the sea-shore, Livy, after breakfast. Will you go?"

Mrs. Marchmont shook her head.

"I am a great deal too tired to think of going out to-day," she said ungraciously.

"And I never felt fresher in my life," the young man responded, laughing; "last night's festivities seem to have revivified me. I wish Mary would come down," he added, with a yawn; "I could give her another lesson in billiards, at any rate. Poor little girl, I am afraid she'll never make a cannon."

Captain Arundel sat down to his breakfast, and drank the cup of tea poured out for him by Olivia. Had she been a sinful woman of another type, she would have put arsenic into the cup perhaps, and so have made an end of the young officer and of her own folly. As it was, she only sat by, with her own untasted breakfast before her, and watched him while he ate a plateful of raised pie, and drank his cup of tea, with the healthy appetite which generally accompanies youth and a good conscience. He sprang up from the table directly he had finished his meal, and cried out impatiently, "What can make Mary so lazy this morning? she is usually such an early riser."

Mrs. Marchmont rose as her cousin said this, and a vague feeling of uneasiness took possession of her mind. She remembered the white face which had blanched beneath the angry glare of her eyes, the blank look of despair that had come over Mary's countenance a few hours before.

"I will go and call her myself," she said. "N—no; I'll send Barbara." She did not wait to ring the bell, but went into the hall, and called sharply, "Barbara! Barbara!"

A woman came out of a passage leading to the housekeeper's room, in answer to Mrs. Marchmont's call; a woman of about fifty years of age, dressed in gray stuff, and with a grave inscrutable face, a wooden countenance that gave no token of its owner's character. Barbara Simmons might have been the best or the worst of women, a Mrs. Fry or a Mrs. Brownrigg, for any evidence her face afforded against either hypothesis.

"I want you to go up-stairs, Barbara, and call Miss Marchmont," Olivia said. "Captain Arundel and I have finished breakfast."

The woman obeyed, and Mrs. Marchmont returned to the dining-room, where Edward was trying to amuse himself with the "Times" of the previous day.

Ten minutes afterwards Barbara Simmons came into the room carrying a letter on a silver waiter. Had the document been a death-warrant, or a telegraphic announcement of the landing of the French at Dover, the well-trained servant would have placed it upon a salver before presenting it to her mistress.

"Miss Marchmont is not in her room, ma'am," she said; "the bed has not been slept on; and I found this letter, addressed to Captain Arundel, upon the table."

Olivia's face grew livid; a horrible dread rushed into her mind. Edward snatched the letter which the servant held towards him.

"Mary not in her room! What, in Heaven's name, can it mean?" he cried.

He tore open the letter. The writing was not easily decipherable for the tears which the orphan girl had shed over it.

"MY OWN DEAR EDWARD,—I have loved you so dearly and so foolishly, and you have been so kind to me, that I have quite forgotten how unworthy I am of your affection. But I am forgetful no longer. Something has happened which has opened my eyes to my own folly,—I know now

that you did not love me; that I had no claim to your love; no charms or attractions such as so many other women possess, and for which you might have loved me. I know this now, dear Edward, and that all my happiness has been a foolish dream; but do not think that I blame any one but myself for what has happened. Take my fortune: long ago, when I was a little girl, I asked my father to let me share it with you. I ask you now to take it all, dear friend; and I go away for ever from a house in which I have learnt how little happiness riches can give. Do not be unhappy about me. I shall pray for you always,—always remembering your goodness to my dead father; always looking back to the day upon which you came to see us in our poor lodging. I am very ignorant of all worldly business, but I hope the law will let me give you Marchmont Towers, and all my fortune, whatever it may be. Let Mr. Paulette see this latter part of my letter, and let him fully understand that I abandon all my rights to you from this day. Good-bye, dear friend; think of me sometimes, but never think of me sorrowfully.

"MARY MARCHMONT."

This was all. This was the letter which the heart-broken girl had written to her lover. It was in no manner different from the letter she might have written to him nine years before in Oakley Street. It was as childish in its ignorance and inexperience; as womanly in its tender self-abnegation.

Edward Arundel stared at the simple lines like a man in a dream, doubtful of his own identity, doubtful of the reality of the world about him, in his hopeless wonderment. He read the letter line by line again and again, first in dull stupefaction, and muttering the words mechanically as he read them, then with the full light of their meaning dawning gradually upon him.

Her fortune! He had never loved her! She had discovered her own folly! What did it all mean? What was the clue to the mystery of this letter, which had stunned and bewildered him, until the very power of reflection seemed lost? The dawning of that day had seen their parting, and the innocent face had been lifted to his, beaming with love and trust. And now —? The letter dropped from his hand, and fluttered slowly to the ground. Olivia Marchmont stooped to pick it up. Her movement aroused the young

man from his stupor, and in that moment he caught the sight of his cousin's livid face.

He started as if a thunderbolt had burst at his feet. An idea, sudden as some inspired revelation, rushed into his mind.

"Read that letter, Olivia Marchmont!" he said.

The woman obeyed. Slowly and deliberately she read the childish epistle which Mary had written to her lover. In every line, in every word, the widow saw the effect of her own deadly work; she saw how deeply the poison, dropped from her own envenomed tongue, had sunk into the innocent heart of the girl.

Edward Arundel watched her with flaming eyes. His tall soldierly frame trembled in the intensity of his passion. He followed his cousin's eyes along the lines in Mary Marchmont's letter, waiting till she should come to the end. Then the tumultuous storm of indignation burst forth, until Olivia cowered beneath the lightning of her cousin's glance.

Was this the man she had called frivolous? Was this the boyish red-coated dandy she had despised? Was this the curled and perfumed representative of swelldom, whose talk never soared to higher flights than the description of

a day's snipe-shooting, or a run with the Burleigh fox-hounds? The wicked woman's eyelids drooped over her averted eyes; she turned away, shrinking from this fearless accuser.

"This mischief is some of *your* work, Olivia Marchmont!" Edward Arundel cried. "It is you who have slandered and traduced me to my dead friend's daughter! Who else would dare accuse a Dangerfield Arundel of baseness? who else would be vile enough to call my father's son a liar and a traitor? It is you who have whispered shameful insinuations into this poor child's innocent ear! I scarcely need the confirmation of your ghastly face to tell me this. It is you who have driven Mary Marchmont from the home in which you should have sheltered and protected her! You envied her, I suppose,—envied her the thousands which might have ministered to your wicked pride and ambition;—the pride which has always held you aloof from those who might have loved you; the ambition that has made you a soured and discontented woman, whose gloomy face repels all natural affection. You envied the gentle girl whom your dead husband committed to your care, and who should have been most sacred to

you. You envied her, and seized the first occasion upon which you might stab her to the very core of her tender heart. What other motive could you have had for doing this deadly wrong? None, so help me Heaven!"

No other motive! Olivia Marchmont dropped down in a heap on the ground near her cousin's feet; not kneeling, but grovelling upon the carpeted floor, writhing convulsively, with her hands twisted one in the other, and her head falling forward on her breast. She uttered no syllable of self-justification or denial. The pitiless words rained down upon her provoked no reply. But in the depths of her heart sounded the echo of Edward Arundel's words: "The pride which has always held you aloof from those who might have loved you; . . . a discontented woman, whose gloomy face repels all natural affection."

"O God!" she thought, "he *might* have loved me, then! He might have loved me, if I could have locked my anguish in my own heart, and smiled at him and flattered him."

And then an icy indifference took possession of her. What did it matter that Edward Arundel repudiated and hated her? He had never loved her. His careless friendliness had made as wide

a gulf between them as his bitterest hate could ever make. Perhaps, indeed, his new-born hate would be nearer to love than his indifference had been, for at least he would think of her now, if he thought ever so bitterly.

"Listen to me, Olivia Marchmont," the young man said, while the woman still crouched upon the ground near his feet, self-confessed in the abandonment of her despair. "Wherever this girl may have gone, driven hence by your wickedness, I will follow her. My answer to the lie you have insinuated against me shall be my immediate marriage with my old friend's orphan child. *He* knew me well enough to know how far I was above the baseness of a fortune-hunter, and he wished that I should be his daughter's husband. I should be a coward and a fool were I to be for one moment influenced by such a slander as that which you have whispered in Mary Marchmont's ear. It is not the individual only whom you traduce. You slander the cloth I wear, the family to which I belong; and my best justification will be the contempt in which I hold your infamous insinuations. When you hear that I have squandered Mary Marchmont's fortune, or cheated the chil-

dren I pray God she may live to bear me, it will be time enough for you to tell the world that your kinsman Edward Dangerfield Arundel is a swindler and a traitor."

He strode out into the hall, leaving his cousin on the ground; and she heard his voice outside the dining-room door making inquiries of the servants.

They could tell him nothing of Mary's flight. Her bed had not been slept in; nobody had seen her leave the house; it was most likely, therefore, that she had stolen away very early, before the servants were astir.

Where had she gone? Edward Arundel's heart beat wildly as he asked himself that question. He remembered how often he had heard of women, as young and innocent as Mary Marchmont, who had rushed to destroy themselves in a tumult of agony and despair. How easily this poor child, who believed that her dream of happiness was for ever broken, might have crept down through the gloomy wood to the edge of the sluggish river, to drop into the weedy stream, and hide her sorrow under the quiet water. He could fancy her, a new Ophelia, pale and pure as the Danish prince's slighted love, floating past the

weird branches of the willows, borne up for a while by the current, to sink in silence amongst the shadows farther down the stream.

He thought of these things in one moment, and in the next dismissed the thought. Mary's letter breathed the spirit of gentle resignation rather than of wild despair. "I shall always pray for you; I shall always remember you," she had written. Her lover remembered how much sorrow the orphan girl had endured in her brief life. He looked back to her childish days of poverty and self-denial; her early loss of her mother; her grief at her father's second marriage; the shock of that beloved father's death. Her sorrows had followed each other in gloomy succession, with only narrow intervals of peace between them. She was accustomed, therefore, to grief. It is the soul untutored by affliction, the rebellious heart that has never known calamity, which becomes mad and desperate, and breaks under the first blow. Mary Marchmont had learned the habit of endurance in the hard school of sorrow.

Edward Arundel walked out upon the terrace, and re-read the missing girl's letter. He was calmer now, and able to face the situation with all its difficulties and perplexities. He was losing

time perhaps in stopping to deliberate; but it was no use to rush off in reckless haste, undetermined in which direction he should seek for the lost mistress of Marchmont Towers. One of the grooms was busy in the stables saddling Captain Arundel's horse, and in the mean time the young man went out alone upon the sunny terrace to deliberate upon Mary's letter.

Complete resignation was expressed in every line of that childish epistle. The heiress spoke most decisively as to her abandonment of her fortune and her home. It was clear, then, that she meant to leave Lincolnshire; for she would know that immediate steps would be taken to discover her hiding-place, and bring her back to Marchmont Towers.

Where was she likely to go in her inexperience of the outer world? where but to those humble relations of her dead mother's, of whom her father had spoken in his letter to Edward Arundel, and with whom the young man knew she had kept up an occasional correspondence, sending them many little gifts out of her pocket-money. These people were small tenant-farmers, at a place called Marlingford, in Berkshire. Edward knew their name and the name of the farm.

"I'll make inquiries at the Kemberling station to begin with," he thought. "There's a through train from the north that stops at Kemberling at a little before six. My poor darling may have easily caught that, if she left the house at five."

Captain Arundel went back into the hall, and summoned Barbara Simmons. The woman replied with rather a sulky air to his numerous questions; but she told him that Miss Marchmont had left her ball-dress upon the bed, and had put on a gray cashmere dress trimmed with black ribbon, which she had worn as half-mourning for her father; a black straw bonnet, with a crape veil, and a silk mantle trimmed with crape. She had taken with her a small carpet-bag, some linen,—for the linen-drawer of her wardrobe was open, and the things scattered confusedly about,—and the little morocco case in which she kept her pearl ornaments, and the diamond ring left her by her father.

"Had she any money?" Edward asked.

"Yes, sir; she was never without money. She spent a good deal amongst the poor people she visited with my mistress; but I dare say she may have had between ten and twenty pounds in her purse."

"She will go to Berkshire," Edward Arundel thought: "the idea of going to her humble friends would be the first to present itself to her mind. She will go to her dead mother's sister, and give her all her jewels, and ask for shelter in the quiet farmhouse. She will act like one of the heroines in the old-fashioned novels she used to read in Oakley Street, the simple-minded damsels of those innocent story-books, who think nothing of resigning a castle and a coronet, and going out into the world to work for their daily bread in a white satin gown, and with a string of pearls to bind their dishevelled locks."

Captain Arundel's horse was brought round to the terrace-steps, as he stood with Mary's letter in his hand, waiting to hurry away to the rescue of his sorrowful love.

"Tell Mrs. Marchmont that I shall not return to the Towers till I bring her stepdaughter with me," he said to the groom; and then, without stopping to utter another word, he shook the rein on his horse's neck, and galloped away along the gravelled drive leading to the great iron gates of Marchmont Towers.

Olivia heard his message, which had been spoken in a clear loud voice, like some knightly

defiance, sounding trumpet-like at a castle-gate. She stood in one of the windows of the dining-room, hidden by the faded velvet curtain, and watched her cousin ride away, brave and handsome as any knight-errant of the chivalrous past, and as true as Bayard himself.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW PROTECTOR.

CAPTAIN ARUNDEL'S inquiries at the Kemberling station resulted in an immediate success. A young lady—a young woman, the railway official called her—dressed in black, wearing a crape veil over her face, and carrying a small carpet-bag in her hand, had taken a second-class ticket for London, by the 5.50., a parliamentary train, which stopped at almost every station on the line, and reached Euston Square at half-past twelve.

Edward looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to two o'clock. The express did not stop at Kemberling; but he would be able to catch it at Swampington at a quarter past three. Even then, however, he could scarcely hope to get to Berkshire that night.

"My darling girl will not discover how foolish her doubts have been until to-morrow," he

thought. "Silly child! has my love so little the aspect of truth that she *can* doubt me?"

He sprang on his horse again, flung a shilling to the railway porter who had held the bridle, and rode away along the Swampington road. The clocks in the gray old Norman turrets were striking three as the young man crossed the bridge, and paid his toll at the little toll-house by the stone archway.

The streets were as lonely as usual in the hot July afternoon; and the long line of sea beyond the dreary marshes was blue in the sunshine. Captain Arundel passed the two churches, and the low-roofed rectory, and rode away to the outskirts of the town, where the station glared in all the brilliancy of new red bricks, and dazzling stuccoed chimneys, athwart a desert of waste ground.

The express-train came tearing up to the quiet platform two minutes after Edward had taken his ticket; and in another minute the clanging bell pealed out its discordant signal, and the young man was borne, with a shriek and a whistle, away upon the first stage of his search for Mary Marchmont.

It was nearly seven o'clock when he reached

Euston Square; and he only got to the Paddington station in time to hear that the last train for Marlingford had just started. There was no possibility of his reaching the little Berkshire village that night. No mail-train stopped within a reasonable distance of the obscure station. There was no help for it, therefore, Captain Arundel had nothing to do but to wait for the next morning.

He walked slowly away from the station, very much disheartened by this discovery.

"I'd better sleep at some hotel up this way," he thought, as he strolled listlessly in the direction of Oxford Street, "so as to be on the spot to catch the first train to-morrow morning. What am I to do with myself all this night, racked with uncertainty about Mary?"

He remembered that one of his brother officers was staying at the hotel in Covent Garden where Edward himself stopped, when business detained him in London for a day or two.

"Shall I go and see Lucas?" Captain Arundel thought. "He's a good fellow, and won't bore me with a lot of questions, if he sees I've something on my mind. There may be some letters for me at E——'s. Poor little Polly!"

He could never think of her without something

of that pitiful tenderness which he might have felt for a young and helpless child, whom it was his duty and privilege to protect and succour. It may be that there was little of the lover's fiery enthusiasm mingled with the purer and more tender feelings with which Edward Arundel regarded his dead friend's orphan daughter; but in place of this there was a chivalrous devotion, such as woman rarely wins in these degenerate modern days.

The young soldier walked through the lamp-lit western streets thinking of the missing girl; now assuring himself that his instinct had not deceived him, and that Mary must have gone straight to the Berkshire farmer's house, and in the next moment seized with a sudden terror that it might be otherwise: the helpless girl might have gone out into a world of which she was as ignorant as a child, determined to hide herself from all who had ever known her. If it should be thus: if, on going down to Marlingford, he obtained no tidings of his friend's daughter, what was he to do? Where was he to look for her next?

He would put advertisements in the papers, calling upon his betrothed to trust him and return to him. Perhaps Mary Marchmont was, of all people

in this world, the least likely to look into a newspaper; but at least it would be doing something to do this, and Edward Arundel determined upon going straight off to Printing-House Square, to draw up an appeal to the missing girl.

It was past ten o'clock when Captain Arundel came to this determination, and he had reached the neighbourhood of Covent Garden and of the theatres. The staring play-bills adorned almost every threshold, and fluttered against every doorpost; and the young soldier, going into a tobacconist's to fill his cigar-case, stared abstractedly at a gaudy blue-and-red announcement of the last dramatic attraction to be seen at Drury Lane. It was scarcely strange that the Captain's thoughts wandered back to his boyhood, that shadowy time, far away behind his later days of Indian warfare and glory, and that he remembered the December night upon which he had sat with his cousin in a box at the great patent theatre, watching the consumptive supernumerary struggling under the weight of his banner. From the box at Drury Lane to the next morning's breakfast in Oakley Street, was but a natural transition of thought; but with that recollection of the humble Lambeth lodging, with the picture of a little girl in a pina-

fore sitting demurely at her father's table, and meekly waiting on his guest, an idea flashed across Edward Arundel's mind, and brought the hot blood into his face.

What if Mary had gone to Oakley Street? Was not this even more likely than that she should seek refuge with her kinsfolk in Berkshire? She had lived in the Lambeth lodging for years, and had only left that plebeian shelter for the grandeur of Marchmont Towers. What more natural than that she should go back to the familiar habitation, dear to her by reason of a thousand associations with her dead father? What more likely than that she should turn instinctively, in the hour of her desolation, to the humble friends whom she had known in her childhood?

Edward Arundel was almost too impatient to wait while the smart young damsel behind the tobacconist's counter handed him change for the half-sovereign which he had just tendered her. He darted out into the street, and shouted violently to the driver of a passing hansom,—there are always loitering hansoms in the neighbourhood of Covent Garden,—who was, after the manner of his kind, looking on any side rather than that upon which Providence had sent him a fare.

"Oakley Street, Lambeth," the young man cried. "Double fare if you get there in ten minutes."

The tall raw-boned horse rattled off at that peculiar pace common to his species, making as much noise upon the pavement as if he had been winning a metropolitan Derby, and at about twenty minutes past nine drew up, smoking and panting, before the dimly lighted windows of the Ladies' Wardrobe, where a couple of flaring tallow-candles illuminated the splendour of a foreground of dirty artificial flowers, frayed satin shoes, and tarnished gilt combs; a middle distance of blue gauzy tissue, embroidered with beetles' wings; and a background of greasy black silk. Edward Arundel flung back the doors of the hansom with a bang, and leaped out upon the pavement. The proprietress of the Ladies' Wardrobe was lolling against the door-post, refreshing herself with the soft evening breezes from the roads of Westminster and Waterloo, and talking to her neighbour.

"Bless her pore dear innercent 'art!" the woman was saying; "she's cried herself to sleep at last. But you never hear any think so pitiful as she talked to me at fust, sweet love!—and the

very picture of my own poor Eliza Jane, as she looked. You might have said it was Eliza Jane come back to life, only paler and more sickly like, and not that beautiful fresh colour, and ringlets curled all round in a crop, as Eliza Ja—"

Edward Arundel burst in upon the good woman's talk, which rambled on in an unintermitting stream, unbroken by much punctuation.

"Miss Marchmont is here," he said; "I know she is. Thank God, thank God! Let me see her please, directly. I am Captain Arundel, her father's friend, and her affianced husband. You remember me, perhaps? I came here nine years ago to breakfast, one December morning. I can recollect you perfectly, and I know that you were always good to my poor friend's daughter. To think that I should find her here! You shall be well rewarded for your kindness to her. But take me to her; pray take me to her at once!"

The proprietress of the wardrobe snatched up one of the candles that guttered in a brass flat-candlestick upon the counter, and led the way up the narrow staircase. She was a good lazy creature, and she was so completely borne down by Edward's excitement, that she could only mutter disjointed sentences, to the effect that the gentle-

man had brought her heart into her mouth, and that her legs felt all of a jelly; and that her poor knees was a'most giving way under her, and other incoherent statements concerning the physical effect of the mental shocks she had that day received.

She opened the door of that shabby sitting-room upon the first-floor, in which the crippled eagle brooded over the convex mirror, and stood aside upon the threshold while Captain Arundel entered the room. A tallow candle was burning dimly upon the table, and a girlish form lay upon the narrow horsehair sofa, shrouded by a woollen shawl.

"She went to sleep about half-an-hour ago, sir," the woman said, in a whisper; "and she cried herself to sleep, pore lamb, I think. I made her some tea, and got her a few creases and a French roll, with a bit of best fresh; but she wouldn't touch nothin', or only a few spoonfuls of the tea, just to please me. What is it that's drove her away from her 'ome, sir, and such a good 'ome too? She showed me a diamont ring as her pore par gave her in his will. He left me twenty pound, pore gentleman,—which he always acted like a gentleman bred and born; and Mr. Pollit, the lawyer, sent his clerk along with it and his

compliments,—though I'm sure I never looked for nothink, having always had my rent faithful to the very minute: and Miss Mary used to bring it down to me so pretty, and—"

But the whispering had grown louder by this time, and Mary Marchmont awoke from her feverish sleep, and lifted her weary head from the hard horsehair pillow and looked about her, half forgetful of where she was, and of what had happened within the last eighteen hours of her life. Her eyes wandered here and there, doubtful as to the reality of what they looked upon, until the girl saw her lover's figure, tall and splendid in the humble apartment, a tender half-reproachful smile upon his face, and his handsome blue eyes beaming with love and truth. She saw him, and a faint shriek broke from her tremulous lips, as she rose and fell upon his breast.

"You love me, then, Edward," she cried; "you do love me!"

"Yes, my darling, as truly and tenderly as ever woman was loved upon this earth."

And then the soldier sat down upon the hard bristly sofa, and with Mary's head still resting upon his breast, and his strong hand straying amongst her disordered hair, he reproached her

for her foolishness, and comforted and soothed her; while the proprietress of the apartment stood, with the brass candlestick in her hand, watching the young lovers and weeping over their sorrows, as if she had been witnessing a scene in a play. Their innocent affection was unrestrained by the good woman's presence; and when Mary had smiled upon her lover, and assured him that she would never, never, never doubt him again, Captain Arundel was fain to kiss the soft-hearted landlady in his enthusiasm, and to promise her the handsomest silk dress that had ever been seen in Oakley Street, amongst all the faded splendours of silk and satin that ladies'-maids brought for her consideration.

"And now my darling, my foolish run-away Polly, what is to be done with you?" asked the young soldier. "Will you go back to the Towers to-morrow morning?"

Mary Marchmont clasped her hands before her face, and began to tremble violently.

"Oh, no, no, no!" she cried; "don't ask me to do that, don't ask me to go back, Edward. I can never go back to that house again, while—"

She stopped suddenly, looking piteously at her lover.

"While my cousin Olivia Marchmont lives there," Captain Arundel said with an angry frown. "God knows it's a bitter thing for me to think that your troubles should come from any of my kith and kin, Polly. She has used you very badly, then, this woman? She has been very unkind to you?"

"No, no! never before last night. It seems so long ago; but it was only last night, was it? Until then she was always kind to me. I didn't love her, you know, though I tried to do so for papa's sake, and out of gratitude to her for taking such trouble with my education; but one can be grateful to people without loving them, and I never grew to love her. But last night—last night—she said such cruel things to me—such cruel things. O Edward, Edward!" the girl cried suddenly, clasping her hands and looking imploringly at Captain Arundel, "were the cruel things she said true? Did I do wrong when I offered to be your wife?"

How could the young man answer this question except by clasping his betrothed to his heart? So there was another little love-scene, over which Mrs. Pimpernel,—the proprietress's name was Pimpernel—wept fresh tears, murmuring that

the Capting was the sweetest young man, sweeter than Mr. Macready in Claude Melnock; and that the scene altogether reminded her of that "cutting" episode where the proud mother went on against the pore young man, and Miss Faucit came out so beautiful. They are a play-going population in Oakley Street, and compassionate and sentimental like all true playgoers.

"What shall I do with you, Miss Marchmont?" Edward Arundel asked gaily, when the little love-scene was concluded. "My mother and sister are away, at a German watering-place, trying some unpronounceable Spa for the benefit of poor Letty's health. Reginald is with them, and my father's alone at Dangerfield. So I can't take you down there, as I might have done if my mother had been at home; I don't much care for the Mostyns, or you might have stopped in Montague Square. There are no friendly friars nowadays who will marry Romeo and Juliet at half-an-hour's notice. You must live a fortnight somewhere, Polly: where shall it be?"

"Oh, let me stay here, please," Miss Marchmont pleaded; "I was always so happy here!"

"Lord love her precious heart!" exclaimed Mrs. Pimpernel, lifting up her hands in a rapture

of admiration. "To think as she shouldn't have a bit of pride, after all the money as her pore par come into! To think as she should wish to stay in her old lodgin's, where everythink shall be done to make her comfortable; and the air back and front is very 'ealthy, though you might not believe it, and the Blind School and Bedlam hard by, and Kennington Common only a pleasant walk, and beautiful and open this warm summer weather."

"Yes, I should like to stop here, please," Mary murmured. Even in the midst of her agitation, overwhelmed as she was by the emotions of the present, her thoughts went back to the past, and she remembered how delightful it would be to go and see the accommodating butcher, and the greengrocer's daughter, the kind butterman who had called her "little lady," and the disreputable gray parrot. How delightful it would be to see these humble friends, now that she was grown up, and had money wherewith to make them presents in token of her gratitude!

"Very well, then, Polly," Captain Arundel said, "you'll stay here. And Mrs.——"

"Pimpernel," the landlady suggested.

"Mrs. Pimpernel will take as good care of you

as if you were Queen of England, and the welfare of the nation depended upon your safety. And I'll stop at my hotel in Covent Garden; and I'll see Richard Paulette,—he's my lawyer as well as yours, you know, Polly,—and tell him something of what has happened, and make arrangements for our immediate marriage."

"Our marriage!"

Mary Marchmont echoed her lover's last words, and looked up at him almost with a bewildered air. She had never thought of an early marriage with Edward Arundel as the result of her flight from Lincolnshire. She had a vague notion that she would live in Oakley Street for years, and that in some remote time the soldier would come to claim her.

"Yes, Polly darling, Olivia Marchmont's conduct has made me decide upon a very bold step. It is evident to me that my cousin hates you; for what reason, Heaven only knows, since you can have done nothing to provoke her hate. When your father was a poor man, it was to me he would have confided you. He changed his mind afterwards, very naturally, and chose another guardian for his orphan child. If my cousin had fulfilled this trust, Mary, I would have deferred to

her authority, and would have held myself aloof until your minority was passed, rather than ask you to marry me without your stepmother's consent. But Olivia Marchmont has forfeited her right to be consulted in this matter. She has tortured you and traduced me by her poisonous slander. If you believe in me, Mary, you will consent to be my wife. My justification lies in the future. You will not find that I shall sponge upon your fortune, my dear, or lead an idle life because my wife is a rich woman."

Mary Marchmont looked up with shy tenderness at her lover.

"I would rather the fortune were yours than mine, Edward," she said. "I will do whatever you wish; I will be guided by you in every thing."

It was thus that John Marchmont's daughter consented to become the wife of the man she loved, the man whose image she had associated since her childhood with all that was good and beautiful in mankind. She knew none of those pretty stereotyped phrases, by means of which well-bred young ladies can go through a graceful fencing-match of hesitation and equivocation, to the anguish of a doubtful and adoring suitor. She had no notion of that delusive negative, that

bewitching feminine "no," which is proverbially understood to mean "yes." Weary courses of Roman Emperors, South-Sea Islands, Sidereal Heavens, Tertiary and Old Red Sandstone, had very ill-prepared this poor little girl for the stern realities of life.

"I will be guided by you, dear Edward," she said; "my father wished me to be your wife; and if I did not love you, it would please me to obey him."

It was eleven o'clock when Captain Arundel left Oakley Street. The hansom had been waiting all the time, and the driver, seeing that his fare was young, handsome, dashing, and what he called "milingtary-like," demanded an enormous sum when he landed the soldier before the portico of the hotel in Covent Garden.

Edward took a hasty breakfast the next morning, and then hurried off to Lincoln's-Inn Fields. But here a disappointment awaited him. Richard Paulette had started for Scotland upon a piscatorial excursion. The elder Paulette was an octogenarian, who lived in the south of France, and kept his name in the business as a fiction, by means of which elderly and obstinate country clients were deluded into the belief that the

solicitor who conducted their affairs was the same legal practitioner who had done business for their fathers and grandfathers before them. Mathewson, a grim man, was away amongst the Yorkshire wolds, superintending the foreclosure of certain mortgages upon a bankrupt baronet's estate. A confidential clerk, who received clients, and kept matters straight during the absence of his employers, was very anxious to be of use to Captain Arundel: but it was not likely that Edward could sit down and pour his secrets into the bosom of a clerk, however trustworthy a personage that employé might be.

The young man's desire had been that his marriage with Mary Marchmont should take place at least with the knowledge and approbation of her dead father's lawyer: but he was impatient to assume the only title by which he might have a right to be the orphan girl's champion and protector; and he had therefore no inclination to wait until the long vacation was over, and Messrs. Paulette and Mathewson returned from their northern wanderings. Again, Mary Marchmont suffered from a continual dread that her stepmother would discover the secret of her humble

retreat, and would follow her and reassume authority over her.

"Let me be your wife before I see her again, Edward," the girl pleaded innocently, when this terror was uppermost in her mind. "She could not say cruel things to me if I were your wife. I know it is wicked to be so frightened of her; because she was always good to me until that night: but I cannot tell you how I tremble at the thought of being alone with her at Marchmont Towers. I dream sometimes that I am with her in the gloomy old house, and that we two are alone there, even the servants all gone, and you far away in India, Edward,—at the other end of the world."

It was as much as her lover could do to soothe and reassure the trembling girl when these thoughts took possession of her. Had he been less sanguine and impetuous, less careless in the buoyancy of his spirits, Captain Arundel might have seen that Mary's nerves had been terribly shaken by the scene between her and Olivia, and all the anguish which had given rise to her flight from Marchmont Towers. The girl trembled at every sound. The shutting of a door, the noise of a cab stopping in the street below, the falling of a book from the table to the floor, startled her

almost as much as if a gunpowder-magazine had exploded in the neighbourhood. The tears rose to her eyes at the slightest emotion. Her mind was tortured by vague fears, which she tried in vain to explain to her lover. Her sleep was broken by dismal dreams, foreboding visions of shadowy evil.

For a little more than a fortnight Edward Arundel visited his betrothed daily in the shabby first-floor in Oakley Street, and sat by her side while she worked at some fragile scrap of embroidery, and talked gaily to her of the happy future; to the intense admiration of Mrs. Pimpernel, who had no greater delight than to assist in the pretty little sentimental drama that was being enacted on her first-floor.

Thus it was that, on a cloudy and autumnal August morning, Edward Arundel and Mary Marchmont were married in a great empty-looking church in the parish of Lambeth, by an indifferent curate, who shuffled through the service at railroad speed, and with far less reverence for the solemn rite than he would have displayed had he known that the pale-faced girl kneeling before the altar-rails was undisputed mistress of eleven thousand a-year. Mrs. Pimpernel, the pew-opener, and the registrar'

who was in waiting in the vestry, and was beguiled thence to give away the bride, were the only witnesses to this strange wedding. It seemed a dreary ceremonial to Mrs. Pimpernel, who had been married at the same church five-and-twenty years before, in a cinnamon satin spencer, and a coal-scuttle bonnet, and with a young person in the dressmaking line in attendance upon her as bridesmaid.

It *was* rather a dreary wedding, no doubt. The drizzling rain dripped ceaselessly in the street without, and there was a smell of damp plaster in the great empty church. The melancholy street-cries sounded dismally from the outer world, while the curate was hurrying through those portentous words which were to unite Edward Arundel and Mary Marchmont until the final day of earthly separation. The girl clung shivering to her lover, her husband now, as they went into the vestry to sign their names in the marriage-register. Throughout the service she had expected to hear a footstep in the aisle behind her, and Olivia Marchmont's cruel voice crying out to forbid the marriage.

"I am your wife now, Edward, am I not?" she said, when she had signed her name in the register.

"Yes, my darling, for ever and for ever,"

"And nothing can part us now?"

"Nothing but death, my dear."

In the exuberance of his spirits, Edward Arundel spoke of the King of Terrors as if he had been a mere nobody, whose power to change or mar the fortunes of mankind was so trifling as to be scarcely worth mentioning.

The vehicle in waiting to carry the mistress of Marchmont Towers upon the first stage of her bridal tour was nothing better than a hack cab. The driver's garments exhaled stale tobacco-smoke in the moist atmosphere, and in lieu of the flowers which are wont to bestrew the bridal path of an heiress, Miss Marchmont trod upon damp and mouldy straw. But she was happy,—happy, with a fearful apprehension that her happiness could not be real,—a vague terror of Olivia's power to torture and oppress her, which even the presence of her lover-husband could not altogether drive away. She kissed Mrs. Pimpernel, who stood upon the edge of the pavement, crying bitterly, with the slippery white lining of a new silk dress, which Edward Arundel had given her for the wedding, gathered tightly round her.

"God bless you, my dear!" cried the honest dealer in frayed satins and tumbled gauzes; "I

couldn't take this more to heart if you was my own Eliza Jane going away with the young man as she was to have married, and as is now a widower with five childrén, two in arms, and the youngest brought up by hand. God bless your pretty face, my dear; and oh, pray take care of her, Captain Arundel, for she's a tender flower, sir, and truly needs your care. And it's but a trifle, my own sweet young missy, for the acceptance of such as you, but it's given from a full heart, and given humbly."

The latter part of Mrs. Pimpernel's speech bore relation to a hard newspaper parcel, which she dropped into Mary's lap. Mrs. Arundel opened the parcel presently, when she had kissed her humble friend for the last time, and the cab was driving towards Nine Elms, and found that Mrs. Pimpernel's wedding-gift was a Scotch shepherdess in china, with a great deal of gilding about her tartan garments, very red legs, a hat and feathers, and a curly sheep. Edward put this article of *virtù* very carefully away in his carpet-bag; for his bride would not have the present treated with any show of disrespect.

"How good of her to give it me!" Mary said; "it used to stand upon the back-parlour

chimney-piece when I was a little girl; and I was so fond of it. Of course I am not fond of Scotch shepherdesses now, you know, dear; but how should Mrs. Pimpernel know that? She thought it would please me to have this one."

"And you'll put it in the western drawing-room at the Towers, won't you, Polly?" Captain Arundel asked, laughing.

"I won't put it anywhere to be made fun of, sir," the young bride answered, with some touch of wifely dignity; "but I'll take care of it, and never have it broken or destroyed; and Mrs. Pimpernel shall see it, when she comes to the Towers, —if I ever go back there," she added, with a sudden change of manner.

"*If* you ever go back there!" cried Edward. "Why, Polly, my dear, Marchmont Towers is your own house. My cousin Olivia is only there upon sufferance, and her own good sense will tell her she has no right to stay there, when she ceases to be your friend and protectress. She is a proud woman, and her pride will surely never suffer her to remain where she must feel she can be no longer welcome."

The young wife's face turned white with terror at her husband's words.

"But I could never ask her to go, Edward," she said. "I wouldn't turn her out for the world. She may stay there for ever if she likes. I never have cared for the place since papa's death; and I couldn't go back while she is there, I'm so frightened of her, Edward, I'm so frightened of her."

The vague apprehension burst forth in this childish cry. Edward Arundel clasped his wife to his breast, and bent over her, kissing her pale forehead, and murmuring soothing words, as he might have done to a child.

"My dear, my dear," he said, "my darling Mary, this will never do; my own love, this is so very foolish."

"I know, I know, Edward; but I can't help it, I can't indeed; I was frightened of her long ago; frightened of her even the first day I saw her, the day you took me to the Rectory. I was frightened of her when papa first told me he meant to marry her; and I am frightened of her now; even now that I am your wife, Edward, I'm frightened of her still."

Captain Arundel kissed away the tears that trembled on his wife's eyelids; but she had scarcely grown quite composed even when the cab

stopped at the Nine Elms railway station. It was only when she was seated in the carriage with her husband, and the rain cleared away as they advanced farther into the heart of the pretty pastoral country, that the bride's sense of happiness and safety in her husband's protection, returned to her. But by that time she was able to smile in his face, and to look forward with delight to a brief sojourn in that pretty Hampshire village, which Edward had chosen for the scene of his honeymoon.

"Only a few days of quiet happiness, Polly," he said; "a few days of utter forgetfulness of all the world except you; and then I must be a man of business again, and write to your stepmother and my father and mother, and Messrs. Paulette and Mathewson, and all the people who ought to know of our marriage."

CHAPTER III.

PAUL'S SISTER.

OLIVIA MARCHMONT shut herself once more in her desolate chamber, making no effort to find the runaway mistress of the Towers; indifferent as to what the slanderous tongues of her neighbours might say of her; hardened, callous, desperate.

To her father, and to any one else who questioned her about Mary's absence,—for the story of the girl's flight was soon whispered abroad, the servants at the Towers having received no injunctions to keep the matter secret,—Mrs. Marchmont replied with such an air of cold and determined reserve as kept the questioners at bay ever afterwards.

So the Kemberling people, and the Swampington people, and all the country gentry within reach of Marchmont Towers, had a mystery and a scandal provided for them, which afforded ample

scope for repeated discussion, and considerably relieved the dull monotony of their lives. But there were some questioners whom Mrs. Marchmont found it rather difficult to keep at a distance; there were some intruders who dared to force themselves upon the gloomy woman's solitude, and who *would* not understand that their presence was abhorrent to her.

These people were a surgeon and his wife, who had newly settled at Kemberling; the best practice in the village falling into the market by reason of the death of a steady-going, gray-headed old practitioner, who for many years had shared with one opponent the responsibility of watching over the health of the Lincolnshire village.

It was about three weeks after Mary Marchmont's flight when these unwelcome guests first came to the Towers.

Olivia sat alone in her dead husband's study,—the same room in which she had sat upon the morning of John Marchmont's funeral,—a dark and gloomy chamber, wainscoted with blackened oak, and lighted only by a massive stone-framed Tudor window looking out into the quadrangle, and overshadowed by that cloistered colonnade beneath whose shelter Edward and Mary had

walked upon the morning of the girl's flight. This wainscoted study was an apartment which most women, having all the rooms in Marchmont Towers at their disposal, would have been likely to avoid; but the gloom of the chamber harmonised with that horrible gloom which had taken possession of Olivia's soul, and the widow turned from the sunny western front, as she turned from all the sunlight and gladness in the universe, to come here, where the summer radiance rarely crept through the diamond-panes of the window, where the shadow of the cloister shut out the glory of the blue sky.

She was sitting in this room,—sitting near the open window, in a high-backed chair of carved and polished oak, with her head resting against the angle of the embayed window, and her handsome profile thrown into sharp relief by the dark green-cloth curtain, which hung in straight folds from the low ceiling to the ground, and made a sombre background to the widow's figure. Mrs. Marchmont had put away all the miserable gewgaws and vanities which she had ordered from London in a sudden excess of folly or caprice, and had reassumed her mourning-robes of lustreless black. She had a book in her hand,—some new

and popular fiction, which all Lincolnshire was eager to read; but although her eyes were fixed upon the pages before her, and her hand mechanically turned over leaf after leaf at regular intervals of time, the fashionable romance was only a weary repetition of phrases, a dull current of words, always intermingled with the images of Edward Arundel and Mary Marchmont, which arose out of every page to mock the hopeless reader.

Olivia flung the book away from her at last, with a smothered cry of rage.

"Is there no cure for this disease?" she muttered. "Is there no relief except madness or death?"

But in the infidelity which had arisen out of her despair this woman had grown to doubt if either death or madness could bring her oblivion of her anguish. She doubted the quiet of the grave; and half-believed that the torture of jealous rage and slighted love might mingle even with that silent rest, haunting her in her coffin, shutting her out of heaven, and following her into a darker world, there to be her torment everlastingly. There were times when she thought madness must mean forgetfulness; but there were

other moments when she shuddered, horror-stricken, at the thought that, in the wandering brain of a mad woman, the image of that grief which had caused the shipwreck of her senses might still hold its place, distorted and exaggerated,—a gigantic unreality, ten thousand times more terrible than the truth. Remembering the dreams which disturbed her broken sleep,—those dreams which, in their feverish horror, were little better than intervals of delirium,—it is scarcely strange if Olivia Marchmont thought thus.

She had not succumbed without many struggles to her sin and despair. Again and again she had abandoned herself to the devils at watch to destroy her, and again and again she had tried to extricate her soul from their dreadful power; but her most passionate endeavours were in vain. Perhaps it was that she did not strive aright; it was for this reason, surely, that she failed so utterly to arise superior to her despair; for otherwise that terrible belief attributed to the Calvinists, that some souls are foredoomed to damnation, would be exemplified by this woman's experience. She could not forget. She could not put away the vengeful hatred that raged like an all-devouring fire in her breast, and she

cried in her agony, "There is no cure for this disease!"

I think her mistake was in this, that she did not go to the right Physician. She practised quackery with her soul, as some people do with their bodies; trying their own remedies, rather than the simple prescriptions of the Divine Healer of all woes. Self-reliant, and scornful of the weakness against which her pride revolted, she trusted to her intellect and her will to lift her out of the moral slough into which her soul had gone down. She said:

"I am not a woman to go mad for the love of a boyish face; I am not a woman to die for a foolish fancy, which the veriest schoolgirl might be ashamed to confess to her companion. I am not a woman to do this, and I *will* cure myself of my folly."

Mrs. Marchmont made an effort to take up her old life, with its dull round of ceaseless duty, its perpetual self-denial. If she had been a Roman Catholic, she would have gone to the nearest convent, and prayed to be permitted to take such vows as might soonest set a barrier between herself and the world; she would have spent the long weary days in perpetual and secret

prayer; she would have worn deeper indentations upon the stones already hollowed by faithful knees. As it was, she made a routine of penance for herself, after her own fashion; going long distances on foot to visit her poor, when she might have ridden in her carriage; courting exposure to rain and foul weather; wearing herself out with unnecessary fatigue, and returning footsore to her desolate home, to fall fainting into the strong arms of her grim attendant, Barbara.

But this self-appointed penance could not shut Edward Arundel and Mary Marchmont from the widow's mind. Walking through a fiery furnace their images would have haunted her still, vivid and palpable even in the agony of death. The fatigue of the long weary walks made Mrs. Marchmont wan and pale; the exposure to storm and rain brought on a tiresome, hacking cough, which worried her by day and disturbed her fitful slumbers by night. No good whatever seemed to come of her endeavours; and the devils who rejoiced at her weakness and her failure claimed her as their own. They claimed her as their own; and they were not without terrestrial agents, working patiently in their service, and ready to help in securing their bargain.

The great clock in the quadrangle had struck the half-hour after three; the atmosphere of the August afternoon was sultry and oppressive. Mrs. Marchmont had closed her eyes after flinging aside her book, and had fallen into a doze: her nights were broken and wakeful, and the hot stillness of the day had made her drowsy.

She was aroused from this half-slumber by Barbara Simmons, who came into the room carrying two cards upon a salver,—the same old-fashioned and emblazoned salver upon which Paul Marchmont's card had been brought to the widow nearly three years before. The Abigail stood halfway between the door and the window by which the widow sat, looking at her mistress's face with a glance of sharp scrutiny.

"She's changed since he came back, and changed again since he went away," the woman thought; "just as she always changed at the Rectory at his coming and going. Why didn't he take to her, I wonder? He might have known her fancy for him, if he'd had eyes to watch her face, or ears to listen to her voice. She's handsomer than the other one, and cleverer in book-learning; but she keeps 'em off—she seems allers to keep 'em off."

I think Olivia Marchmont would have torn the very heart out of this waiting-woman's breast, had she known the thoughts that held a place in it: had she known that the servant who attended upon her, and took wages from her, dared to pluck out her secret, and to speculate upon her suffering.

The widow awoke suddenly, and looked up with an impatient frown. She had not been awakened by the opening of the door, but by that unpleasant sensation which almost always reveals the presence of a stranger to a sleeper of nervous temperament.

"What is it, Barbara?" she asked; and then, as her eyes rested on the cards, she added, angrily, "Haven't I told you that I would not see any callers to-day? I am worn out with my cough, and feel too ill to see any one."

"Yes, Miss Livy," the woman answered;—she called her mistress by this name still, now and then, so familiar had it grown to her during the childhood and youth of the Rector's daughter;—"I didn't forget that, Miss Livy: I told Richardson you was not to be disturbed. But the lady and gentleman said, if you saw what was wrote upon the back of one of the cards, you'd be sure

to make an exception in their favour. I think that was what the lady said. She's a middle-aged lady, very talkative and pleasant-mannered," added the grim Barbara, in nowise relaxing the stolid gravity of her own manner as she spoke.

Olivia snatched the cards from the salver.

"Why do people worry me so?" she cried, impatiently. "Am I not to be allowed even five minutes' sleep without being broken in upon by some intruder or other?"

Barbara Simmons looked at her mistress's face. Anxiety and sadness dimly showed themselves in the stolid countenance of the lady's-maid. A close observer, penetrating below that aspect of wooden solemnity which was Barbara's normal expression, might have discovered a secret: the quiet waiting-woman loved her mistress with a jealous and watchful affection, that took heed of every change in its object.

Mrs. Marchmont examined the two cards, which bore the names of Mr. and Mrs. Weston, Kemberling. On the back of the lady's card these words were written in pencil:

"Will Mrs. Marchmont be so good as to see Lavina Weston, Paul Marchmont's younger sister, and a connection of Mrs. M.'s?"

Olivia shrugged her shoulders, as she threw down the card.

"Paul Marchmont! Lavinia Weston!" she muttered; "yes, I remember he said something about a sister married to a surgeon at Stanfield. Let these people come to me, Barbara."

The waiting-woman looked doubtfully at her mistress.

"You'll maybe smooth your hair, and freshen yourself up a bit, before ye see the folks, Miss Livy," she said, in a tone of mingled suggestion and entreaty. "Ye've had a deal of worry lately, and it's made ye look a little fagged and haggard-like. I'd not like the Kemberling folks to say as you was ill."

Mrs. Marchmont turned fiercely upon the Abigail.

"Let me alone!" she cried. "What is it to you, or to any one, how I look? What good have my looks done me, that I should worry myself about them?" she added, under her breath. "Show these people in here, if they want to see me."

"They've been shown into the western drawing-room, ma'am; — Richardson took 'em in there."

Barbara Simmons fought hard for the preservation of appearances. She wanted the Rector's daughter to receive these strange people, who had dared to intrude upon her, in a manner befitting the dignity of John Marchmont's widow. She glanced furtively at the disorder of the gloomy chamber. Books and papers were scattered here and there; the hearth and low fender were littered with heaps of torn letters,—for Olivia Marchmont had no tenderness for the memorials of the past, and indeed took a fierce delight in sweeping away the unsanctified records of her joyless, loveless life. The high-backed oaken chairs had been pushed out of their places; the green-cloth cover had been drawn half off the massive table, and hung in trailing folds upon the ground. A book flung here; a shawl there; a handkerchief in another place; an open secretaire, with scattered documents and uncovered inkstand, —littered the room, and bore mute witness of the restlessness of its occupant. It needed no very subtle psychologist to read aright those separate tokens of a disordered mind; of a weary spirit which had sought distraction in a dozen occupations, and had found relief in none. It was some vague sense of this that caused Barbara Sim-

mons's anxiety. She wished to keep strangers out of this room, in which her mistress, wan, haggard, and weary-looking, revealed her secret by so many signs and tokens. But before Olivia could make any answer to her servant's suggestion, the door, which Barbara had left ajar, was pushed open by a very gentle hand, and a sweet voice said, in cheery chirping accents,

"I am sure I may come in; may I not, Mrs. Marchmont? The impression my brother Paul's description gave me of you is such a very pleasant one, that I venture to intrude uninvited, almost forbidden, perhaps."

The voice and manner of the speaker were so airy and self-possessed, there was such a world of cheerfulness and amiability in every tone, that, as Olivia Marchmont rose from her chair, she put her hand to her head, dazed and confounded, as if by the too boisterous carolling of some caged bird. What did they mean, these accents of gladness, these clear and untroubled tones, which sounded shrill, and almost discordant, in the despairing woman's ears? She stood, pale and worn, the very picture of all gloom and misery, staring hopelessly at her visitor; too much abandoned to her grief to remember, in that first moment,

the stern demands of pride. She stood still; revealing, by her look, her attitude, her silence, her abstraction, a whole history to the watchful eyes that were looking at her.

Mrs. Weston lingered on the threshold of the chamber in a pretty half-fluttering manner; which was charmingly expressive of a struggle between a modest poor-relation-like diffidence and an earnest desire to rush into Olivia's arms. The surgeon's wife was a delicate-looking little woman, with features that seemed a miniature and feminine reproduction of her brother Paul's, and with very light hair,—hair so light and pale that, had it turned as white as the artist's in a single night, very few people would have been likely to take heed of the change. Lavinia Weston was eminently what is generally called a *lady-like* woman. She always conducted herself in that especial and particular manner which was exactly fitted to the occasion. She adjusted her behaviour by the nicest shades of colour and hair-breadth scale of measurement. She had, as it were, made for herself a homœopathic system of good manners, and could mete out politeness and courtesy in the veriest globules, never administering either too much or too little. To her

husband she was a treasure beyond all price; and if the Lincolnshire surgeon, who was a fat, solemn-faced man, with a character as level and monotonous as the flats and fens of his native county, was henpecked, the feminine autocrat held the reins of government so lightly, that her obedient subject was scarcely aware how very irresponsible his wife's authority had become.

As Olivia Marchmont stood confronting the timid hesitating figure of the intruder, with the width of the chamber between them, Lavinia Weston, in her crisp muslin-dress and scarf, her neat bonnet and bright ribbons and primly-adjusted gloves, looked something like an adventurous canary who had a mind to intrude upon the den of a hungry lioness. The difference, physical and moral, between the timid bird and the savage forest-queen could be scarcely wider than that between the two women.

But Olivia did not stand for ever embarrassed and silent in her visitor's presence. Her pride came to her rescue. She turned sternly upon the polite intruder.

"Walk in, if you please, Mrs. Weston," she said, "and sit down. I was denied to you just

now because I have been ill, and have ordered my servants to deny me to every one."

"But, my dear Mrs. Marchmont," murmured Lavinia Weston in soft, almost dove-like accents, "if you have been ill, is not your illness another reason for seeing us, rather than for keeping us away from you? I would not, of course, say a word which could in any way be calculated to give offence to your regular medical attendant,—you have a regular medical attendant, no doubt; from Swampington, I dare say,—but a doctor's wife may often be useful when a doctor is himself out of place. There are little nervous ailments—depression of spirits, mental uneasiness—from which women, and sensitive women, suffer acutely, and which perhaps a woman's more refined nature alone can thoroughly comprehend. You are not looking well, my dear Mrs. Marchmont. I left my husband in the drawing-room, for I was so anxious that our first meeting should take place without witnesses. Men think women sentimental when they are only impulsive. Weston is a good simple-hearted creature, but he knows as much about a woman's mind as he does of an Æolian harp. When the strings vibrate, he hears the low plaintive notes, but he has no idea whence

the melody comes. It is thus with us, Mrs. Marchmont. These medical men watch us in the agonies of hysteria; they hear our sighs, they see our tears, and in their awkwardness and ignorance they prescribe commonplace remedies out of the pharmacopœia. No, dear Mrs. Marchmont, you do not look well. I fear it is the mind, the mind, which has been over-strained. Is it not so?"

Mrs. Weston put her head on one side as she asked this question, and smiled at Olivia with an air of gentle insinuation. If the doctor's wife wished to plumb the depths of the widow's gloomy soul, she had an advantage here; for Mrs. Marchmont was thrown off her guard by the question, which had been perhaps asked hap-hazard, or it may be with a deeply considered design. Olivia turned fiercely upon the polite questioner.

"I have been suffering from nothing but a cold which I caught the other day," she said; "I am not subject to any fine-ladylike hysteria, I can assure you, Mrs. Weston."

The doctor's wife pursed up her lips into a sympathetic smile, not at all abashed by this rebuff. She had seated herself in one of the high-backed chairs, with her muslin skirt spread out

about her. She looked a living exemplification of all that is neat and prim and commonplace, in contrast with the pale, stern-faced woman, standing rigid and defiant in her long black robes.

"How very chy-arming!" exclaimed Mrs. Weston. "You are really *not* nervous. Dee-ar me; and from what my brother Paul said, I should have imagined that any one so highly organised must be rather nervous. But I really fear I am impertinent, and that I presume upon our very slight relationship. It *is* a relationship, is it not, although such a very slight one?"

"I have never thought of the subject," Mrs. Marchmont replied coldly. "I suppose, however, that my marriage with your brother's cousin—"

"And *my* cousin—"

"Made a kind of connexion between us. But Mr. Marchmont gave me to understand that you lived at Stanfield, Mrs. Weston."

"Until last week, positively until last week," answered the surgeon's wife. "I see you take very little interest in village gossip, Mrs. Marchmont, or you would have heard of the change at Kemberling."

"What change?"

"My husband's purchase of poor old Mr. Dawnfield's practice. The dear old man died a month ago,—you heard of his death, of course,—and Mr. Weston negotiated the purchase with Mrs. Dawnfield in less than a fortnight. We came here early last week, and already we are making friends in the neighbourhood. How strange that you should not have heard of our coming!"

"I do not see much society," Olivia answered indifferently, "and I hear nothing of the Kemberling people."

"Indeed!" cried Mrs. Weston; "and we hear so much of Marchmont Towers at Kemberling."

She looked full in the widow's face as she spoke, her stereotyped smile subsiding into a look of greedy curiosity; a look whose intense eagerness could not be concealed.

That look, and the tone in which her last sentence had been spoken, said as plainly as the plainest words could have done, "I have heard of Mary Marchmont's flight."

Olivia understood this; but in the passionate depth of her own madness she had no power to fathom the meanings or the motives of other people. She revolted against this Mrs. Weston, and disliked her because the woman intruded

upon her in her desolation; but she never once thought of Lavinia Weston's interest in Mary's movements; she never once remembered that the frail life of that orphan girl only stood between this woman's brother and the rich heritage of Marchmont Towers.

Blind and forgetful of everything in the hideous egotism of her despair, what was Olivia Marchmont but a fitting tool, a plastic and easily-moulded instrument, in the hands of unscrupulous people, whose hard intellects had never been beaten into confused shapelessness in the fiery furnace of passion?

Mrs. Weston had heard of Mary Marchmont's flight; but she had heard half a dozen different reports of that event, as widely diversified in their details as if half a dozen heiresses had fled from Marchmont Towers. Every gossip in the place had a separate story as to the circumstances which had led to the girl's running away from her home. The accounts vied with each other in graphic force and minute elaboration; the conversations that had taken place between Mary and her stepmother, between Edward Arundel and Mrs. Marchmont, between the Rector of Swampington and nobody in particular, would have filled a

volume, as related by the gossips of Kemberling; but as everybody assigned a different cause for the terrible misunderstanding at the Towers, and a different direction for Mary's flight,—and as the railway official at the station, who could have thrown some light on the subject, was a stern and moody man, who had little sympathy with his kind, and held his tongue persistently,—it was not easy to get very near the truth. Under these circumstances, then, Mrs. Weston determined upon seeking information at the fountain-head, and approaching the cruel stepmother, who, according to some of the reports, had starved and beaten her dead husband's child.

"Yes, dear Mrs. Marchmont," said Lavinia Weston, seeing that it was necessary to come direct to the point if she wished to wring the truth from Olivia; "yes, we hear of everything at Kemberling; and I need scarcely tell you, that we heard of the sad trouble which you have had to endure since your ball—the ball that is spoken of as the most chy-arming entertainment remembered in the neighbourhood for a long time. We heard of this sad girl's flight."

Mrs. Marchmont looked up with a dark frown, but made no answer.

"Was she—it really is such a very painful question, that I almost shrink from—but was Miss Marchmont at all—eccentric—a little mentally deficient? Pray pardon me, if I have given you pain by such a question; but——"

Olivia started, and looked sharply at her visitor. "Mentally deficient? No!" she said. But as she spoke her eyes dilated, her pale cheeks grew paler, her upper lip quivered with a faint convulsive movement. It seemed as if some idea presented itself to her with a sudden force that almost took away her breath.

"*Not* mentally deficient!" repeated Lavinia Weston; "dee-ar me! It's a great comfort to hear that. Of course Paul saw very little of his cousin, and he was not therefore in a position to judge,—though his opinions, however rapidly arrived at, are generally so *very* accurate;—but he gave me to understand that he thought Miss Marchmont appeared a little—just a little—weak in her intellect. I am very glad to find he was mistaken."

Olivia made no reply to this speech. She had seated herself in her chair by the window; she looked straight before her into the flagged quadrangle, with her hands lying idle in her lap. It

seemed as if she were actually unconscious of her visitor's presence, or as if, in her scornful indifference, she did not even care to affect any interest in that visitor's conversation.

Lavinia Weston returned again to the attack.

"Pray, Mrs. Marchmont, do not think me intrusive or impertinent," she said pleadingly, "if I ask you to favour me with the true particulars of this sad event. I am sure you will be good enough to remember that my brother Paul, my sister, and myself are Mary Marchmont's nearest relatives on her father's side, and that we have therefore some right to feel interested in her?"

By this very polite speech Lavinia Weston plainly reminded the widow of the insignificance of her own position at Marchmont Towers. In her ordinary frame of mind Olivia would have resented the ladylike slight, but to-day she neither heard nor heeded it; she was brooding with a stupid, unreasonable persistency over the words "mental deficiency," "weak intellect." She only roused herself by a great effort to answer Mrs. Weston's question, when that lady had repeated it in very plain words.

"I can tell you nothing about Miss Marchmont's flight," she said, coldly, "except that she chose to

run away from her home. I found reason to object to her conduct upon the night of the ball; and the next morning she left the house, assigning no reason—to me, at any rate—for her absurd and improper behaviour."

"She assigned no reason to *you*, my dear Mrs. Marchmont; but she assigned a reason to somebody, I infer, from what you say?"

"Yes; she wrote a letter to my cousin, Captain Arundel."

"Telling him the reason of her departure?"

"I don't know—I forget. The letter told nothing clearly; it was wild and incoherent."

Mrs. Weston sighed,—a long-drawn, desponding sigh.

"Wild and incoherent!" she murmured, in a pensive tone. "How grieved Paul will be to hear of this! He took such an interest in his cousin—a delicate and fragile-looking young creature, he told me. Yes, he took a very great interest in her, Mrs. Marchmont, though you may perhaps scarcely believe me when I say so. He kept himself purposely aloof from this place; his sensitive nature led him to abstain from even revealing his interest in Miss Marchmont. His position, you must remember, with regard to this poor dear girl,

is a very delicate—I may say a very painful—one."

Olivia remembered nothing of the kind. The value of the Marchmont estates; the sordid worth of those wide-stretching farms, spreading far-away into Yorkshire; the pitiful, closely-calculated revenue, which made Mary a wealthy heiress,—were so far from the dark thoughts of this woman's desperate heart, that she no more suspected Mrs. Weston of any mercenary design in coming to the Towers, than of burglarious intentions with regard to the silver spoons in the plate-room. She only thought that the surgeon's wife was a tiresome woman, against whose pertinacious civility her angry spirit chafed and rebelled, until she was almost driven to order her from the room.

In this cruel weariness of spirit Mrs. Marchmont gave a short impatient sigh, which afforded a sufficient hint to such an accomplished tactician as her visitor.

"I know I have tired you, my dear Mrs. Marchmont," the doctor's wife said, rising and arranging her muslin scarf as she spoke, in token of her immediate departure. "I am so sorry to find you a sufferer from that nasty hacking cough; but of

course you have the best advice,—Mr. Barlow from Swampington, I think you said?"—Olivia had said nothing of the kind;—"and I trust the warm weather will prevent the cough taking any hold of your chest. If I might venture to suggest flannels—so many young women quite ridicule the idea of flannels—but, as the wife of a humble provincial practitioner, I have learned their value. Good-bye, dear Mrs. Marchmont. I may come again, may I not, now that the ice is broken, and we are so well acquainted with each other? Good-bye."

Olivia could not refuse to take at least *one* of the two plump and tightly-gloved hands which were held out to her with an air of frank cordiality; but the widow's grasp was loose and nerveless, and, inasmuch as two consentient parties are required to the shaking of hands as well as to the getting up of a quarrel, the salutation was not a very hearty one.

The surgeon's pony must have been weary of standing before the flight of shallow steps leading to the western portico, when Mrs. Weston took her seat by her husband's side in the gig, which had been newly painted and varnished since the worthy couple's hegira from Stanfield.

The surgeon was not an ambitious man, nor a designing man; he was simply stupid and lazy—lazy although, in spite of himself, he led an active and hard-working life; but there are many square men whose sides are cruelly tortured by the pressure of the round holes into which they are ill-advisedly thrust, and if our destinies were meted out to us in strict accordance with our temperaments, Mr. Weston should have been a lotus-eater. As it was, he was content to drudge on, mildly complying with every desire of his wife; doing what she told him, because it was less trouble to do the hardest work at her bidding than to oppose her. It would have been surely less painful for Macbeth to have finished that ugly business of the murder than to have endured my lady's black contemptuous scowl, and the bitter scorn and contumely concentrated in those four words, "Give *me* the daggers."

Mr. Weston asked one or two commonplace questions about his wife's interview with John Marchmont's widow; but, slowly apprehending that Lavinia did not care to discuss the matter, he relapsed into meek silence, and devoted all his intellectual powers to the task of keeping the pony out of the deeper ruts in the rugged road

between Marchmont Towers and Kemberling High Street.

"What is the secret of that woman's life?" thought Lavinia Weston during that homeward drive. "Has she ill-treated the girl, or is she plotting in some way or other to get hold of the Marchmont fortune? Pshaw! that's impossible. And yet she may be making a purse, somehow or other, out of the estate. Anyhow, there is bad blood between the two women."

CHAPTER IV.

A STOLEN HONEYMOON.

THE village to which Edward Arundel took his bride was within a few miles of Winchester. The young soldier had become familiar with the place in his early boyhood, when he had gone to spend a part of one bright midsummer holiday at the house of a schoolfellow; and had ever since cherished a friendly remembrance of the winding trout-streams, the rich verdure of the valleys, and the sheltering hills that shut in the pleasant little cluster of thatched cottages, the pretty white-walled villas, and the grey old church.

But to Mary, whose experiences of town and country were limited to the dingy purlieus of Oakley Street and the fenny flats of Lincolnshire, this Hampshire village seemed a rustic paradise, which neither trouble nor sorrow could ever approach. She had trembled at the thought of Olivia's coming in Oakley Street; but here she

seemed to lose all terror of her stern stepmother,—here, sheltered and protected by her young husband's love, she fancied that she might live her life out happy and secure.

She told Edward this one sunny morning, as they sat by the young man's favourite trout-stream. Captain Arundel's fishing-tackle lay idle on the turf at his side, for he had been beguiled into forgetfulness of a ponderous trout he had been watching and finessing with for upwards of an hour, and had flung himself at full length upon the mossy margin of the water, with his uncovered head lying in Mary's lap.

The childish bride would have been content to sit for ever thus in that rural solitude, with her fingers twisted in her husband's chestnut curls, and her soft eyes keeping timid watch upon his handsome face,—so candid and unclouded in its careless repose. The undulating meadow-land lay half-hidden in a golden haze, only broken here and there by the glitter of the brighter sunlight that lit up the waters of the wandering streams that intersected the low pastures. The massive towers of the cathedral, the grey walls of St. Cross, loomed dimly in the distance; the bubbling plash of a mill-stream sounded like some

monotonous lullaby in the drowsy summer atmosphere. Mary looked from the face she loved to the fair landscape about her, and a tender solemnity crept into her mind—a reverent love and admiration for this beautiful earth, which was almost akin to awe.

"How pretty this place is, Edward!" she said. "I had no idea there were such places in all the wide world. Do you know, I think I would rather be a cottage-girl here than an heiress in Lincolnshire. Edward, if I ask you a favour, will you grant it?"

She spoke very earnestly, looking down at her husband's upturned face; but Captain Arundel only laughed at her question, without even caring to lift the drowsy eyelids that drooped over his blue eyes.

"Well, my pet, if you want anything short of the moon, I suppose your devoted husband is scarcely likely to refuse it. Our honeymoon is not a fortnight old yet, Polly dear; you wouldn't have me turn tyrant quite as soon as this. Speak out, Mrs. Arundel, and assert your dignity as a British matron. What is the favour I am to grant?"

"I want you to live here always, Edward dar-

ling," pleaded the girlish voice. "Not for a fortnight or a month, but for ever and ever. I have never been happy at Marchmont Towers. Papa died there, you know, and I cannot forget that. Perhaps that ought to have made the place sacred to me, and so it has; but it is sacred like papa's tomb in Kemberling Church, and it seems like profanation to be happy in it, or to forget my dead father even for a moment. Don't let us go back there, Edward. Let my stepmother live there all her life. It would seem selfish and cruel to turn her out of the house she has so long been mistress of. Mr. Gormby will go on collect- the rents, you know, and can send us as much money as we want; and we can take that pretty house we saw to let on the other side of Milldale, —the house with the rookery, and the dovecotes, and the sloping lawn leading down to the water. You know you don't like Lincolnshire, Edward, any more than I do, and there's scarcely any trout-fishing near the Towers."

Captain Arundel opened his eyes, and lifted himself out of his reclining position before he answered his wife.

"My own precious Polly," he said, smiling fondly at the gentle childish face turned in such

earnestness towards his own; "my runaway little wife, rich people have their duties to perform as well as poor people; and I am afraid it would never do for you to hide in this out-of-the-way Hampshire village, and play absentee from stately Marchmont and all its dependencies. I love that pretty, infantine, unworldly spirit of yours, my darling; and I sometimes wish we were two grown-up babes in the wood, and could wander about gathering wild flowers, and eating blackberries and hazel-nuts, until the shades of evening closed in, and the friendly robins came to bury us. Don't fancy I am tired of our honeymoon, Polly, or that I care for Marchmont Towers any more than you do; but I fear the non-residence plan would never answer. The world would call my little wife eccentric, if she ran away from her grandeur; and Paul Marchmont the artist,—of whom your poor father had rather a bad opinion, by the way,—would be taking out a statute of lunacy against you."

"Paul Marchmont!" repeated Mary. "Did papa dislike Mr. Paul Marchmont?"

"Well, poor John had a sort of a prejudice against the man, I believe; but it was only a prejudice, for he freely confessed that he could

assign no reason for it. But whatever Mr. Paul Marchmont may be, you must live at the Towers, Mary, and be Lady Bountiful-in-chief in your neighbourhood, and look after your property, and have long interviews with Mr. Gormby, and become altogether a woman of business; so that when I go back to India——"

Mary interrupted him with a little cry:

"Go back to India!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean, Edward?"

"I mean, my darling, that my business in life is to fight for my Queen and country, and not to spunge upon my wife's fortune. You don't suppose I'm going to lay down my sword at seven-and-twenty years of age, and retire upon my pension? No, Polly; you remember what Lord Nelson said on the deck of the *Victory* at Trafalgar. That saying can never be so hackneyed as to lose its force. I must do my duty, Polly—I must do my duty, even if duty and love pull different ways, and I have to leave my darling, in the service of my country."

Mary clasped her hands in despair, and looked piteously at her lover-husband, with the tears streaming down her pale cheeks.

"O Edward," she cried, "how cruel you are;

how very, very cruel you are to me! What is the use of my fortune if you won't share it with me, if you won't take it all; for it is yours, my dearest—it is all yours? I remember the words in the Marriage Service, 'with all my goods I thee endow.' I have given you Marchmont Towers, Edward; nobody in the world can take it away from you. You never, never, never could be so cruel as to leave me! I know how brave and good you are, and I am proud to think of your noble courage and all the brave deeds you did in India. But you *have* fought for your country, Edward; you *have* done your duty. Nobody can expect more of you; nobody shall take you from me. O my darling, my husband, you promised to shelter and defend me while our lives last! You won't leave me—you won't leave me, will you?"

Edward Arundel kissed the tears away from his wife's pale face, and drew her head upon his bosom.

"My love," he said tenderly, "you cannot tell how much pain it gives me to hear you talk like this. What can I do? To give up my profession would be to make myself next kin to a pauper. What would the world say of me, Mary? Think

of that. This runaway marriage would be a dreadful dishonour to me, if it were followed by a life of lazy dependence on my wife's fortune. Nobody can dare to slander the soldier who spends the brightest years of his life in the service of his country. You would not surely have me be less than true to myself, Mary darling? For my honour's sake, I must leave you."

"O no, no, no!" cried the girl, in a low wailing voice. Unselfish and devoted as she had been in every other crisis of her young life, she could not be reasonable or self-denying here; she was seized with despair at the thought of parting with her husband. No, not even for his honour's sake could she let him go. Better that they should both die now, in this early noontide of their happiness.

"Edward, Edward," she sobbed, clinging convulsively about the young man's neck, "don't leave me—don't leave me!"

"Will you go with me to India, then, Mary?"

She lifted her head suddenly, and looked her husband in the face, with the gladness in her eyes shining through her tears, like an April sun through a watery sky.

"I would go to the end of the world with you,

my own darling," she said; "the burning sands and the dreadful jungles would have no terrors for me, if I were with you, Edward."

Captain Arundel smiled at her earnestness.

"I won't take you into the jungle, my love," he answered, playfully; "or if I do, your palki shall be well guarded, and all ravenous beasts kept at a respectful distance from my little wife. A great many ladies go to India with their husbands, Polly, and come back very little the worse for the climate or the voyage; and except your money, there is no reason you should not go with me."

"Oh, never mind my money; let anybody have that."

"Polly," cried the soldier, very seriously, "we must consult Richard Paulette as to the future. I don't think I did right in marrying you during his absence; and I have delayed writing to him too long, Polly. Those letters must be writtten this afternoon."

"The letter to Mr. Paulette and to your father?"

"Yes; and the letter to my cousin Olivia."

Mary's face grew sorrowful again, as Captain Arundel said this.

"*Must* you tell my stepmother of our marriage?" she said.

"Most assuredly, my dear. Why should we keep her in ignorance of it? Your father's will gave her the privilege of advising you, but not the power to interfere with your choice, whatever that choice might be. You were your own mistress, Mary, when you married me. What reason have you to fear my cousin Olivia?"

"No reason, perhaps," the girl answered, sadly; "but I do fear her. I know I am very foolish, Edward, and you have reason to despise me,—you who are so brave. But I could never tell you how I tremble at the thought of being once more in my stepmother's power. She said cruel things to me, Edward. Every word she spoke seemed to stab me to the heart; but it isn't that only. There's something more than that; something that I can't describe, that I can't understand; something which tells me that she hates me."

"Hates you, darling?"

"Yes, Edward; yes, she hates me. It wasn't always so, you know. She used to be only cold and reserved, but lately her manner has changed. I thought that she was ill, perhaps, and that my presence worried her. People often wish to be

alone, I know, when they are ill. O Edward, I have seen her shrink from me, and shudder if her dress brushed against mine, as if I had been some horrible creature. What have I done, Edward, that she should hate me?"

Captain Arundel knitted his brows, and set himself to work out this womanly problem; but he could make nothing of it. Yes, what Mary had said was perfectly true: Olivia hated her. The young man had seen that upon the morning of the girl's flight from Marchmont Towers; he had seen vengeful fury and vindictive passion raging in the dark face of John Marchmont's widow. But what reason could the woman have for her hatred of this innocent girl? Again and again Olivia's cousin asked himself this question; and he was so far away from the truth at last, that he could only answer it by imagining the lowest motive for the widow's bad feeling. "She envies my poor little girl her fortune and position," he thought.

"But you won't leave me alone with my step-mother, will you, Edward?" Mary said, recurring to her old prayer. "I am not afraid of her, nor of anybody or anything in the world, while you are with me,—how should I be?—but I think if

I were to be alone with her again, I should die. She would speak to me again as she spoke upon the night of the ball, and her bitter taunts would kill me. I *could* not bear to be in her power again, Edward."

"And you shall not, my darling," answered the young man, enfolding the slender, trembling figure in his strong arms. "My own childish pet, you shall never be exposed to any woman's insolence or tyranny. You shall be sheltered and protected, and hedged in on every side by your husband's love. And when I go to India, you shall sail with me, my pearl. Mary, look up and smile at me, and let's have no more talk of cruel stepmothers. How strange it seems to me, Polly dear, that you should have been so womanly when you were a child, and yet are so childlike now you are a woman!"

The mistress of Marchmont Towers looked doubtfully at her husband, as if she feared her childishness might be displeasing to him.

"You don't love me any the less because of that, do you, Edward?" she asked timidly.

"Because of what, my treasure?"

"Because I am so—childish?"

"Polly," cried the young man, "do you think

Jupiter liked Hebe any the less because she was as fresh and innocent as the nectar she served out to him? If he had, my dear, he'd have sent for Clotho, or Atropos, or some one or other of the elderly maiden ladies of Hades, to wait upon him as cupbearer. I wouldn't have you otherwise than you are, Polly, by so much as one thought."

The girl looked up at her husband in a rapture of innocent affection.

"I am too happy, Edward," she said, in a low, awe-stricken whisper—"I am too happy! So much happiness can never last."

Alas! the orphan girl's experience of this life had early taught her the lesson which some people learn so late. She had learnt to distrust the equal blue of a summer sky, the glorious splendour of the blazing sunlight. She was accustomed to sorrow; but these brief glimpses of perfect happiness filled her with a dim sense of terror. She felt like some earthly wanderer who had strayed across the threshold of Paradise. In the midst of her delight and admiration, she trembled for the moment in which the ruthless angels, bearing flaming swords, should drive her from the celestial gates.

"It can't last, Edward," she murmured.

"Can't last, Polly!" cried the young man; "why, my dove is transformed all at once into a raven. We have outlived our troubles, Polly, like the hero and heroine in one of your novels; and what is to prevent our living happy ever afterwards, like them? If you remember, my dear, no sorrows or trials ever fall to the lot of people *after* marriage. The persecutions, the separations, the estrangements, are all ante-nuptial. When once your true novelist gets his hero and heroine up to the altar-rails in real earnest,—he gets them into the church sometimes, and then forbids the banns, or brings a former wife, or a rightful husband, pale and denouncing, from behind a pillar, and drives the wretched pair out again, to persecute them through three hundred pages more before he lets them get back again,—but when once the important words are spoken and the knot tied, the story's done, and the happy couple get forty or fifty years' wedded bliss, as a set-off against the miseries they have endured in the troubled course of a twelvemonth's courtship. That's the sort of thing, isn't it, Polly?"

The clock of St. Cross, sounding faintly athwart the meadows, struck three as the young man finished speaking.

"Three o'clock, Polly!" he cried; "we must go home, my pet. I mean to be businesslike to-day."

Upon each day in that happy honeymoon holiday Captain Arundel had made some such declaration with regard to his intention of being businesslike; that is to say, setting himself deliberately to the task of writing those letters which should announce and explain his marriage to the people who had a right to hear of it. But the soldier had a dislike to all letter-writing, and a special horror of any epistolary communication which could come under the denomination of a business-letter; so the easy summer days slipped by,—the delicious drowsy noontides, the soft and dreamy twilight, the tender moonlit nights,—and the Captain put off the task for which he had no fancy, from after breakfast until after dinner, and from after dinner until after breakfast; always beguiled away from his open travelling-desk by a word from Mary, who called him to the window to look at a pretty child on the village green before the inn, or at the blacksmith's dog, or the tinker's donkey, or a tired Italian organ-boy who had strayed into that out-of-the-way nook, or at the smart butcher from Winchester, who rattled

over in a pony-cart twice a week to take orders from the gentry round about, and to insult and defy the local purveyor, whose stock-in-trade generally seemed to consist of one leg of mutton and a dish of pig's fry.

The young couple walked slowly through the meadows, crossing rustic wooden bridges that spanned the winding stream, loitering to look down into the clear water at the fish which Captain Arundel pointed out, but which Mary could never see;—that young lady always fixing her eyes upon some long trailing weed afloat in the transparent water, while the silvery trout indicated by her husband glided quietly away to the sedgy bottom of the stream. They lingered by the water-mill, beneath whose shadow some children were fishing; they seized upon every pretext for lengthening that sunny homeward walk, and only reached the inn as the village clocks were striking four; at which hour Captain Arundel had ordered dinner.

But after the simple little repast, mild and artless in its nature as the fair young spirit of the bride herself; after the landlord, sympathetic yet respectful, had in his own person attended upon his two guests; after the pretty rustic chamber

had been cleared of all evidence of the meal that had been eaten, Edward Arundel began seriously to consider the business in hand.

"The letters must be written, Po'ly," he said, seating himself at a table near the open window. Trailing branches of jasmine and honeysuckle made a framework round the diamond-paned casement; the perfumed blossoms blew into the room with every breath of the warm August breeze, and hung trembling in the folds of the chintz curtains. Mr. Arundel's gaze wandered dreamily away through this open window to the primitive picture without,—the scattered cottages upon the other side of the green, the cattle standing in the pond, the cackling geese hurrying homeward across the purple ridge of common, the village gossips loitering beneath the faded sign that hung before the low white tavern at the angle of the road. He looked at all these things as he flung his leathern desk upon the table, and made a great parade of unlocking and opening it.

"The letters must be written," he repeated, with a smothered sigh. "Did you ever notice a peculiar property in stationery, Polly?"

Mrs. Edward Arundel only opened her brown

eyes to their widest extent, and stared at her husband.

"No, I see you haven't," said the young man. "How should you, you fortunate Polly? You've never had to write any business-letters yet, though you are an heiress. The peculiarity of all stationery, my dear, is, that it is possessed of an intuitive knowledge of the object for which it is to be used. If one has to write an unpleasant letter, Polly, it might go a little smoother, you know; one might round one's paragraphs, and spell the difficult words—the 'believes' and 'receives,' the 'tills' and 'untils,' and all that sort of thing—better with a pleasant pen, an easy-going, jolly, soft-nibbed quill, that would seem to say, 'Cheer up, old fellow! I'll carry you through it; we'll get to "your very obedient servant" before you know where you are,' and so on. But, bless your heart, Polly! let a poor unbusinesslike fellow try to write a business-letter, and everything goes against him. The pen knows what he's at, and jibs, and stumbles, and shies about the paper, like a broken-down screw; the ink turns thick and lumpy; the paper gets as greasy as a London pavement after a fall of snow, till a poor fellow gives up, and knocks

under to the force of circumstances. You see if my pen doesn't splutter, Polly, the moment I address Richard Paulette."

Captain Arundel was very careful in the adjustment of his sheet of paper, and began his letter with an air of resolution.

"White Hart Inn, Milldale, near Winchester,
"August 14th.

"MY DEAR SIR,"

He wrote as much as this with great promptitude, and then, with his elbow on the table, fell to staring at his pretty young wife and drumming his fingers on his chin. Mary was sitting opposite her husband at the open window, working, or making a pretence of being occupied with some impossible fragment of Berlin wool-work, while she watched her husband.

"How pretty you look in that white frock, Polly!" said the soldier; "you call those things frocks, don't you? And that blue sash, too,—you ought always to wear white, Mary, like your namesakes abroad who are *vouée au blanc* by their faithful mothers, and who are a blessing to the laundresses for the first seven or fourteen years of their lives. What shall I say to Paulette? He's such a jolly fellow, there oughtn't

to be much difficulty about the matter. 'My dear sir,' seems absurdly stiff; 'my dear Paulette,' —that's better,—'I write this to inform you that your client, Miss Mary March——' What's that, Polly?"

It was the postman, a youth upon a pony, with the afternoon letters from London. Captain Arundel flung down his pen and went to the window. He had some interest in this young man's arrival, as he had left orders that such letters as were addressed to him at the hotel in Covent Garden should be forwarded to him at Milldale.

"I daresay there's a letter from Germany, Polly," he said eagerly. "My mother and Letitia are capital correspondents; I'll wager anything there's a letter, and I can answer it in the one I'm going to write this evening, and that'll be killing two birds with one stone. I'll run down to the postman, Polly."

Captain Arundel had good reason to go after his letters, for there seemed little chance of those missives being brought to him. The youthful postman was standing in the porch drinking ale out of a ponderous earthenware mug, and talking to the landlord, when Edward went down.

"Any letters for me, Dick?" the Captain asked.

He knew the Christian name of almost every visitor or hanger-on at the little inn, though he had not stayed there an entire fortnight, and was as popular and admired as if he had been some free-spoken young squire to whom all the land round about belonged.

"'Ees, sir," the young man answered, shuffling off his cap; "there be two letters for ye."

He handed the two packets to Captain Arundel, who looked doubtfully at the address of the uppermost, which, like the other, had been re-directed by the people at the London hotel. The original address of this letter was in a handwriting that was strange to him; but it bore the postmark of the village from which the Dangerfield letters were sent.

The back of the inn looked into an orchard, and through an open door opposite to the porch Edward Arundel saw the low branches of the trees, and the ripening fruit red and golden in the afternoon sunlight. He went out into this orchard to read his letters, his mind a little disturbed by the strange handwriting upon the Dangerfield epistle.

The letter was from his father's housekeeper, imploring him most earnestly to go down to the

Park without delay. Squire Arundel had been stricken with paralysis, and was declared to be in imminent danger. Mrs. and Miss Arundel and Mr. Reginald were away in Germany. The faithful old servant implored the younger son to lose no time in hurrying home, if he wished to see his father alive.

The soldier leaned against the gnarled grey trunk of an old apple-tree, and stared at this letter with a white awe-stricken face.

What was he to do? He must go to his father, of course. He must go without a moment's delay. He must catch the first train that would carry him westward from Southampton. There could be no question as to his duty. He must go; he must leave his young wife.

His heart sank with a sharp thrill of pain, and with perhaps some faint shuddering sense of an unknown terror, as he thought of this.

"It was lucky I didn't write the letters," he reflected; "no one will guess the secret of my darling's retreat. She can stay here till I come back to her. God knows I shall hurry back the moment my duty sets me free. These people will take care of her. No one will know where to look for her. I'm very glad I didn't write to Olivia. We

were so happy this morning! Who could think that sorrow would come between us so soon?"

Captain Arundel looked at his watch. It was a quarter to six o'clock, and he knew that an express left Southampton for the west at eight. There would be time for him to catch that train with the help of a sturdy pony belonging to the landlord of the White Hart, which would rattle him over to the station in an hour and a half. There would be time for him to catch the train; but, oh! how little time to comfort his darling—how little time to reconcile his young wife to the temporary separation!

He hurried back to the porch, briefly explained to the landlord what had happened, ordered the pony and gig to be got ready immediately, and then went very, very slowly upstairs, to the room in which his young wife sat by the open window waiting for his return.

Mary looked up at his face as he entered the room, and that one glance told her of some new sorrow.

"Edward," she cried, starting up from her chair with a look of terror, "my stepmother has come."

Even in his trouble the young man smiled

at his foolish wife's all-absorbing fear of Olivia Marchmont.

"No, my darling," he said; "I wish to heaven our worst trouble were the chance of your father's widow breaking in upon us. Something has happened, Mary; something very sorrowful, very serious for me. My father is ill, Polly dear, dangerously ill, and I must go to him."

Mary Arundel drew a long breath. Her face had grown very white, and the hands that were linked tightly round her husband's arm trembled a little.

"I will try to bear it," she said; "I will try to bear it."

"God bless you, my darling!" the soldier answered fervently, clasping his young wife to his breast. "I know you will. It will be a very short parting, Mary dearest. I will come back to you directly I have seen my father. If he is worse, there will be little need for me to stop at Dangerfield; if he is better, I can take you back there with me. My own darling love, it is very bitter for us to be parted thus; but I know that you will bear it like a heroine. Won't you, Polly?"

"I will try to bear it, dear.

She said very little more than this, but clung about her husband, not with any desperate force, not with any clamorous and tumultuous grief, but with a half-despondent resignation; as a drowning man, whose strength is well-nigh exhausted, may cling, in his hopelessness, to a spar, which he knows he must presently abandon.

Mary Arundel followed her husband hither and thither while he made his brief and hurried preparations for the sudden journey; but although she was powerless to assist him,—for her trembling hands let fall everything she tried to hold, and there was a mist before her eyes, which distorted and blotted the outline of every object she looked at,—she hindered him by no noisy lamentations, she distressed him by no tears. She suffered, as it was her habit to suffer, quietly and uncomplainingly.

The sun was sinking when she went with Edward downstairs to the porch, before which the landlord's pony and gig were in waiting, in custody of a smart lad who was to accompany Mr. Arundel to Southampton. There was no time for any protracted farewell. It was better so, perhaps, Edward thought. He would be back so soon, that the grief he felt in this parting—

and it may be that his suffering was scarcely less than Mary's—seemed wasted anguish, to which it would have been sheer cowardice to give way. But for all this the soldier very nearly broke down when he saw his childish wife's piteous face, white in the evening sunlight, turned to him in mute appeal, as if the quivering lips would fain have entreated him to abandon all and to remain. He lifted the fragile figure in his arms,—alas! it had never seemed so fragile as now,—and covered the pale face with passionate kisses and fast-dropping tears.

"God bless and defend you, Mary! God keep——"

He was ashamed of the huskiness of his voice, and putting his wife suddenly away from him, he sprang into the gig, snatched the reins from the boy's hand, and drove away at the pony's best speed. The old-fashioned vehicle disappeared in a cloud of dust; and Mary, looking after her husband with eyes that were as yet tearless, saw nothing but glaring light and confusion, and a pastoral landscape that reeled and heaved like a stormy sea.

It seemed to her, as she went slowly back to her room, and sat down amidst the disorder of

open portmanteaus and overturned hatboxes, which the young man had thrown here and there in his hurried selection of the few things necessary for him to take on his hasty journey —it seemed as if the greatest calamity of her life had now befallen her. As hopelessly as she had thought of her father's death, she now thought of Edward Arundel's departure. She could not see beyond the acute anguish of this separation. She could not realise to herself that there was no cause for all this terrible sorrow; that the parting was only a temporary one; and that her husband would return to her in a few days at the furthest. Now that she was alone, now that the necessity for heroism was past, she abandoned herself utterly to the despair that had held possession of her soul from the moment in which Captain Arundel had told her of his father's illness.

The sun went down behind the purple hills that sheltered the western side of the little village. The tree-tops in the orchard below the open window of Mrs. Arundel's bedroom grew dim in the grey twilight. Little by little the sound of voices in the rooms below died away into stillness. The fresh rosy-cheeked country

girl who had waited upon the young husband and wife, came into the sitting-room with a pair of wax-candles in old-fashioned silver candlesticks, and lingered in the room for a little time, expecting to receive some order from the lonely watcher. But Mary had locked the door of her bedchamber, and sat with her head upon the sill of the open window, looking out into the dim orchard. It was only when the stars glimmered in the tranquil sky that the girl's blank despair gave way before a sudden burst of tears, and she flung herself down beside the white-curtained bed to pray for her young husband. She prayed for him in an ecstatic fervour of love and faith, carried away by the new hopefulness that arose out of her ardent supplications, and picturing him going triumphant on his course, to find his father out of danger,—restored to health, perhaps,—and to return to her before the stars glimmered through the darkness of another summer's night. She prayed for him, hoping and believing everything; though at the hour in which she knelt, with the faint starlight shimmering upon her upturned face and clasped hands, Edward Arundel was lying, maimed and senseless, in the wretched waiting-room of a little railway-station in Dor-

setshire, watched over by an obscure country surgeon, while the frightened officials scudded here and there in search of some vehicle in which the young man might be conveyed to the nearest town.

There had been one of those accidents which seem terribly common on every line of railway, however well managed. A signalman had mistaken one train for another; a flag had been dropped too soon; and the down-express had run into a heavy luggage-train blundering up from Exeter with farm-produce for the London markets. Two men had been killed, and a great many passengers hurt; some very seriously. Edward Arundel's case was perhaps one of the most serious amongst these.

CHAPTER V.

SOUNDING THE DEPTHS.

LAVINIA WESTON spent the evening after her visit to Marchmont Towers at her writing-desk, which, like everything else appertaining to her, was a model of neatness and propriety; perfect in its way, although it was no marvellous specimen of walnut-wood and burnished gold, no elegant structure of papier-mâché and mother-of-pearl, but simply a schoolgirl's homely rosewood desk, bought for fifteen shillings or a guinea.

Mrs. Weston had administered the evening refreshment of weak tea, stale bread, and strong butter to her meek husband, and had dismissed him to the surgery, a sunken and rather cellar-like apartment opening out of the prim second-best parlour, and approached from the village street by a side-door. The surgeon was very well content to employ himself with the preparation of such draughts and boluses as were required by

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the ailing inhabitants of Kemberling, while his wife sat at her desk in the room above him. He left his gallipots and pestle and mortar once or twice in the course of the evening, to clamber ponderously up the three or four stairs leading to the sitting-room, and stare through the keyhole of the door at Mrs. Weston's thoughtful face, and busy hand gliding softly over the smooth note-paper. He did this in no prying or suspicious spirit, but out of sheer admiration for his wife.

"What a mind she has!" he murmured rapturously, as he went back to his work; "what a mind!"

The letter which Lavinia Weston wrote that evening was a very long one. She was one of those women who write long letters upon every convenient occasion. To-night she covered two sheets of note-paper with her small neat handwriting. Those two sheets contained a detailed account of the interview that had taken place that day between the surgeon's wife and Olivia; and the letter was addressed to the artist, Paul Marchmont.

Perhaps it was in consequence of the receipt of this letter that Paul Marchmont arrived at his sister's house at Kemberling two days after Mrs.

Weston's visit to Marchmont Towers. He told the surgeon that he came to Lincolnshire for a few days' change of air, after a long spell of very hard work; and George Weston, who looked upon his brother-in-law as an intellectual demi-god, was very well content to accept any explanation of Mr. Marchmont's visit.

"Kemberling isn't a very lively place for you, Mr. Paul," he said apologetically,—he always called his wife's brother Mr. Paul,—"but I dare say Lavinia will contrive to make you comfortable. She persuaded me to come here when old Dawnfield died; but I can't say she acted with her usual tact, for the business ain't as good as my Stanfield practice; but I don't tell Lavinia so."

Paul Marchmont smiled.

"The business will pick up by-and-by, I dare-say," he said. "You'll have the Marchmont Towers family to attend to in good time, I suppose."

"That's what Lavinia said," answered the surgeon. "'Mrs. John Marchmont can't refuse to employ a relation,' she says; 'and, as first-cousin to Mary Marchmont's father, I ought'—meaning herself, you know—'to have some influence in

that quarter.' But then, you see, the very week we come here the gal goes and runs away; which rather, as one may say, puts a spoke in our wheel, you know."

Mr. George Weston rubbed his chin reflectively as he concluded thus. He was a man given to spending his leisure-hours—when he had any leisure, which was not very often—in tavern parlours, where the affairs of the nation were settled and unsettled every evening over sixpenny glasses of hollands and water; and he regretted his removal from Stanfield, which had been as the uprooting of all his dearest associations. He was a solemn man, who never hazarded an opinion lightly,—perhaps because he never had an opinion to hazard,—and his stolidity won him a good deal of respect from strangers; but in the hands of his wife he was meeker than the doves that cooed in the pigeon-house behind his dwelling, and more plastic than the knob of white wax upon which industrious Mrs. Weston was wont to rub her thread when engaged in the mysteries of that elaborate and terrible science which women paradoxically call *plain* needlework.

Paul Marchmont presented himself at the Towers upon the day after his arrival at Kember-

ling. His interview with the widow was a very long one. He had studied every line of his sister's letter; he had weighed every word that had fallen from Olivia's lips and had been recorded by Lavinia Weston; and taking the knowledge thus obtained as his starting-point, he took his dissecting-knife and went to work at an intellectual autopsy. He anatomised the wretched woman's soul. He made her tell her secret, and bare her tortured breast before him; now wringing some hasty word from her impatience, now entrapping her into some admission, —if only so much as a defiant look, a sudden lowering of the dark brows, an involuntary compression of the lips. He *made* her reveal herself to him. Poor Rosencranz and Guildenstern were sorry blunderers in that art which is vulgarly called pumping, and were easily put out by a few quips and quaint retorts from the mad Danish prince; but Paul Marchmont *would* have played upon Hamlet more deftly than ever mortal musician played upon pipe or recorder, and would have fathomed the remotest depths of that sorrowful and erratic soul. Olivia writhed under the torture of that polite inquisition, for she knew that her secrets were being extorted from her;

that her pitiful folly—that folly which she would have denied even to herself, if possible—was being laid bare in all its weak foolishness. She knew this; but she was compelled to smile in the face of her bland inquisitor, to respond to his commonplace expressions of concern about the protracted absence of the missing girl, and meekly to receive his suggestions respecting the course it was her duty to take. He had the air of responding to *her* suggestions, rather than of himself dictating any particular line of conduct. He affected to believe that he was only agreeing with some understood ideas of hers, while he urged his own views upon her.

"Then we are quite of one mind in this, my dear Mrs. Marchmont," he said at last; "this unfortunate girl must not be suffered to remain away from her legitimate home any longer than we can help. It is our duty to find and bring her back. I need scarcely say that you, being bound to her by every tie of affection, and having, beyond this, the strongest claim upon her gratitude for your devoted fulfilment of the trust confided in you,—one hears of these things, Mrs. Marchmont, in a country village like Kemberling,—I need scarcely say that you are the most fitting person to win

the poor child back to a sense of her duty—if she *can* be won to such a sense." Paul Marchmont added, after a sudden pause and a thoughtful sigh, "I sometimes fear——"

He stopped abruptly, waiting until Olivia should question him.

"You sometimes fear——?"

"That—that the error into which Miss Marchmont has fallen is the result of a mental rather than of a moral deficiency."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean this, my dear Mrs. Marchmont," answered the artist, gravely; "one of the most powerful evidences of the soundness of a man's brain is his capability of assigning a reasonable motive for every action of his life. No matter how unreasonable the action in itself may seem, if the motive for that action can be demonstrated. But the moment a man acts *without* motive, we begin to take alarm and to watch him. He is eccentric; his conduct is no longer amenable to ordinary rule; and we begin to trace his eccentricities to some weakness or deficiency in his judgment or intellect. Now, I ask you what motive Mary Marchmont can have had for running away from this house?"

Olivia quailed under the piercing scrutiny of the artist's cold grey eyes, but she did not attempt to reply to his question.

"The answer is very simple," he continued, after that long scrutiny; "the girl could have had no cause for flight; while, on the other hand, every reasonable motive that can be supposed to actuate a woman's conduct was arrayed against her. She had a happy home, a kind stepmother. She was within a few years of becoming undisputed mistress of a very large estate. And yet, immediately after having assisted at a festive entertainment, to all appearance as gay and happy as the gayest and happiest there, this girl runs away in the dead of the night, abandoning the mansion which is her own property, and assigning no reason whatever for what she does. Can you wonder, then, if I feel confirmed in an opinion that I formed upon the day on which I heard the reading of my cousin's will?"

"What opinion?"

"That Mary Marchmont is as feeble in mind as she is fragile in body."

He launched this sentence boldly, and waited for Olivia's reply. He had discovered the widow's secret. He had fathomed the cause of her jealous

hatred of Mary Marchmont; but even *he* did not yet understand the nature of the conflict in the desperate woman's breast. She could not be wicked all at once. Against every fresh sin she made a fresh struggle, and she would not accept the lie which the artist tried to force upon her.

"I do not think that there is any deficiency in my stepdaughter's intellect," she said, resolutely.

She was beginning to understand that Paul Marchmont wanted to ally himself with her against the orphan heiress, but as yet she did not understand why he should do so. She was slow to comprehend feelings that were utterly foreign to her own nature. There was so little of mercenary baseness in this strange woman's soul, that had the flame of a candle alone stood between her and the possession of Marchmont Towers, I doubt if she would have cared to waste a breath upon its extinction. She had lived away from the world, and out of the world; and it was difficult for her to comprehend the mean and paltry wickedness which arise out of the worship of Baal.

Paul Marchmont recoiled a little before the straight answer which the widow had given him.

"You think Miss Marchmont strong-minded, then, perhaps?" he said.

"No; not strong minded."

"My dear Mrs. Marchmont, you deal in paradoxes," exclaimed the artist. "You say that your stepdaughter is neither weak-minded nor strong-minded?"

"Weak enough, perhaps, to be easily influenced by other people; weak enough to believe anything my cousin Edward Arundel might choose to tell her; but not what is generally called deficient in intellect."

"You think her perfectly able to take care of herself?"

"Yes; I think so."

"And yet this running away looks almost as if ——. But I have no wish to force any unpleasant belief upon you, my dear madam. I think—as you yourself appear to suggest—that the best thing we can do is to get this poor girl home again as quickly as possible. It will never do for the mistress of Marchmont Towers to be wandering about the world with Mr. Edward Arundel. Pray pardon me, Mrs. Marchmont, if I speak rather disrespectfully of your cousin; but I really cannot think that the gentleman has acted very honourably in this business."

Olivia was silent. She remembered the passionate indignation of the young soldier, the angry defiance hurled at her, as Edward Arundel galloped away from the gaunt western façade. She remembered these things, and involuntarily contrasted them with the smooth blandness of Paul Marchmont's talk, and the deadly purpose lurking beneath it—of which deadly purpose some faint suspicion was beginning to dawn upon her.

If she could have thought Mary Marchmont mad,—if she could have thought Edward Arundel base, she would have been glad; for then there would have been some excuse for her own wickedness. But she could not think so. She slipped little by little down into the black gulf; now dragged by her own mad passion; now lured yet further downward by Paul Marchmont.

Between this man and eleven thousand a year the life of a fragile girl was the solitary obstacle. For three years it had been so, and for three years Paul Marchmont had waited—patiently, as it was his habit to wait—the hour and the opportunity for action. The hour and opportunity had come, and this woman, Olivia Marchmont, only stood in his way. She must become either his

enemy or his tool, to be baffled or to be made useful. He had now sounded the depths of her nature, and he determined to make her his tool.

"It shall be my business to discover this poor child's hiding-place," he said; "when that is found I will communicate with you, and I know you will not refuse to fulfil the trust confided to you by your late husband. You will bring your stepdaughter back to this house, and henceforward protect her from the dangerous influence of Edward Arundel."

Olivia looked at the speaker with an expression which seemed like terror. It was as if she said,—

"Are you the devil, that you hold out this temptation to me, and twist my own passions to serve your purpose?"

And then she paltered with her conscience.

"Do you consider that it is my duty to do this?" she asked.

"My dear Mrs. Marchmont, most decidedly."

"I will do it, then. I—I—wish to do my duty."

"And you can perform no greater act of charity than by bringing this unhappy girl back to a sense of *her* duty. Remember, that her reputa-

tion, her future happiness, may fall a sacrifice to this foolish conduct, which, I regret to say, is very generally known in the neighbourhood. Forgive me if I express my opinion too freely; but I cannot help thinking, that if Mr. Arundel's intentions had been strictly honourable, he would have written to you before this, to tell you that his search for the missing girl had failed; or, in the event of his finding her, he would have taken the earliest opportunity of bringing her back to her own home. My poor cousin's somewhat unprotected position, her wealth, and her inexperience of the world, place her at the mercy of a fortune-hunter; and Mr. Arundel has himself to thank if his conduct gives rise to the belief that he wishes to compromise this girl in the eyes of the scandalous, and thus make sure of your consent to a marriage which would give him command of my cousin's fortune."

Olivia Marchmont's bosom heaved with the stormy beating of her heart. Was she to sit calmly by and hold her peace while this man slandered the brave young soldier, the bold, reckless, generous-hearted lad, who had shone upon her out of the darkness of her life, as the very incarnation of all that is noble and admirable in man-

kind? Was she to sit quietly by and hear a stranger lie away her kinsman's honour, truth, and manhood?

Yes, she must do so. This man had offered her a price for her truth and her soul. He was ready to help her to the revenge she longed for. He was ready to give her his aid in separating the innocent young lovers, whose pure affection had poisoned her life, whose happiness was worse than the worst death to her. She kept silent, therefore, and waited for Paul to speak again.

"I will go up to Town to-morrow, and set to work about this business," the artist said, as he rose to take leave of Mrs. Marchmont. "I do not believe that I shall have much difficulty in finding the young lady's hiding-place. My first task shall be to look for Mr. Arundel. You can perhaps give me the address of some place in London where your cousin is in the habit of staying?"

"I can."

"Thank you; that will very much simplify matters. I shall write you immediate word of any discovery I make, and will then leave all the rest to you. My influence over Mary Marchmont as an entire stranger could be nothing. Yours,

on the contrary, must be unbounded. It will be for you to act upon my letter."

Olivia Marchmont waited for two days and nights for the promised letter. Upon the third morning it came. The artist's epistle was very brief:

"My dear Mrs. Marchmont,—I have made the necessary discovery. Miss Marchmont is to be found at the White Hart Inn, Milldale, near Winchester. May I venture to urge your proceeding there in search of her without delay?

"Yours very faithfully,

"Paul Marchmont.

"*Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square,*

"*Aug. 15th.*"

CHAPTER VI.

RISEN FROM THE GRAVE.

THE rain dripped ceaselessly upon the dreary earth under a grey November sky,—a dull and lowering sky, that seemed to brood over this lower world with some menace of coming down to blot out and destroy it. The express-train, rushing headlong across the wet flats of Lincolnshire, glared like a meteor in the gray fog; the dismal shriek of the engine was like the cry of a bird of prey. The few passengers who had chosen that dreary winter's day for their travels looked despondently out at the monotonous prospect, seeking in vain to descry some spot of hope in the joyless prospect; or made futile attempts to read their newspapers by the dim light of the lamp in the roof of the carriage. Sulky passengers shuddered savagely as they wrapped themselves in huge woollen rugs or ponderous coverings made from the skins of wild beasts. Melancholy passengers

drew grotesque and hideous travelling-caps over their brows, and, coiling themselves in the corner of their seats, essayed to sleep away the weary hours. Everything upon this earth seemed dismal and damp, cold and desolate, incongruous and uncomfortable.

But there was one first-class passenger in that Lincolnshire express who made himself especially obnoxious to his fellows by the display of an amount of restlessness and superabundant energy quite out of keeping with the lazy despondency of those about him.

This was a young man with a long tawny beard and a white face,—a very handsome face, though wan and attenuated, as if with some terrible sickness, and somewhat disfigured by certain strappings of plaister, which were bound about a patch of his skull a little above the left temple. This young man had one side of the carriage to himself; and a sort of bed had been made up for him with extra cushions, upon which he lay at full length, when he was still, which was never for very long together. He was enveloped almost to the chin in voluminous railway-rugs, but, in spite of these coverings, shuddered every now and then, as if with cold. He had a pocket-pistol

amongst his travelling paraphernalia, which he applied occasionally to his dry lips. Sometimes drops of perspiration broke suddenly out upon his forehead, and were brushed away by a tremulous hand, that was scarcely strong enough to hold a cambric handkerchief. In short, it was sufficiently obvious to every one that this young man with the tawny beard had only lately risen from a sick-bed, and had risen therefrom considerably before the time at which any prudent medical practitioner would have given him licence to do so.

It was evident that he was very, very ill, but that he was, if anything, more ill at ease in mind than in body; and that some terrible gnawing anxiety, some restless care, some horrible uncertainty or perpetual foreboding of trouble, would not allow him to be at peace. It was as much as the three fellow-passengers who sat opposite to him could do to bear with his impatience, his restlessness, his short half-stifled moans, his long weary sighs; the horror of his fidgety feet shuffled incessantly upon the cushions; the suddenly convulsive jerks with which he would lift himself upon his elbow to stare fiercely into the dismal fog outside the carriage window; the groans that

were wrung from him as he flung himself into new and painful positions; the frightful aspect of physical agony which came over his face as he looked at his watch,—and he drew out and consulted that ill-used chronometer, upon an average, once in a quarter of an hour; his impatient crumpling of the crisp leaves of a new "Bradshaw," which he turned over ever and anon, as if, by perpetual reference to that mysterious time-table, he might hasten the advent of the hour at which he was to reach his destination. He was, altogether, a most aggravating and exasperating travelling companion; and it was only out of Christian forbearance with the weakness of his physical state that his irritated fellow-passengers refrained from uniting themselves against him, and casting him bodily out of the window of the carriage; as a clown sometimes flings a venerable but tiresome pantaloon through a square trap or pitfall, lurking, undreamed of, in the façade of an honest tradesman's dwelling.

The three passengers had, in divers manners, expressed their sympathy with the invalid traveller; but their courtesies had not been responded to with any evidence of gratitude or heartiness. The young man had answered his companions in

an absent fashion, scarcely deigning to look at them as he spoke;—speaking altogether with the air of some sleep-walker, who roams hither and thither absorbed in a dreadful dream, making a world for himself, and peopling it with horrible images unknown to those about him.

Had he been ill?—Yes, very ill. He had had a railway accident, and then brain-fever. He had been ill for a long time.

Somebody asked him how long.

He shuffled about upon the cushions, and groaned aloud at this question, to the alarm of the man who had asked it.

"How long?" he cried, in a fierce agony of mental or bodily uneasiness;—"how long? Two months,—three months,—ever since the 15th of August."

Then another passenger, looking at the young man's very evident sufferings from a commercial point of view, asked him whether he had had any compensation.

"Compensation!" cried the invalid. "What compensation?"

"Compensation from the Railway Company. I hope you've a strong case against them, for you've evidently been a terrible sufferer."

It was dreadful to see the way in which the sick man writhed under this question.

"Compensation!" he cried. "What compensation can they give me for an accident that shut me in a living grave for three months, that separated me from ——? You don't know what you're talking about, sir," he added suddenly; "I can't think of this business patiently; I can't be reasonable. If they'd hacked *me* to pieces, I shouldn't have cared. I've been under a red-hot Indian sun, when we fellows couldn't see the sky above us for the smoke of the cannons and the flashing of the sabres about our heads, and I'm not afraid of a little cutting and smashing more or less; but when I think what others may have suffered through —— I'm almost mad, and ——!"

He couldn't say any more, for the intensity of his passion had shaken him as a leaf is shaken by a whirlwind; and he fell back upon the cushions, trembling in every limb, and groaning aloud. His fellow-passengers looked at each other rather nervously, and two out of the three entertained serious thoughts of changing carriages when the express stopped midway between London and Lincoln.

But they were reassured by-and-by; for the

invalid, who was Captain Edward Arundel, or that pale shadow of the dashing young cavalry officer which had risen from a sick-bed, relapsed into silence, and displayed no more alarming symptoms than that perpetual restlessness and disquietude which is cruelly wearying even to the strongest nerves. He only spoke once more, and that was when the short day, in which there had been no actual daylight, was closing in, and the journey nearly finished, when he startled his companions by crying out suddenly,—

"O my God! will this journey never come to an end? Shall I never be put out of this horrible suspense?"

The journey, or at any rate Captain Arundel's share of it, came to an end almost immediately afterwards, for the train stopped at Swampington; and while the invalid was staggering feebly to his feet, eager to scramble out of the carriage, his servant came to the door to assist and support him.

"You seem to have borne the journey wonderful, sir," the man said respectfully, as he tried to rearrange his master's wrappings, and to do as much as circumstances, and the young man's restless impatience, would allow of being done for his comfort.

"I have suffered the tortures of the infernal regions, Morrison," Captain Arundel ejaculated, in answer to his attendant's congratulatory address. "Get me a fly directly; I must go to the Towers at once."

"Not to-night, sir, surely?" the servant remonstrated, in a tone of alarm. "Your Mar and the doctors said you *must* rest at Swampington for a night."

"I'll rest nowhere till I've been to Marchmont Towers," answered the young soldier passionately. "If I must walk there,—if I'm to drop down dead on the road,—I'll go. If the cornfields betweeen this and the Towers were a blazing prairie or a raging sea, I'd go. Get me a fly, man; and don't talk to me of my mother or the doctors. I'm going to look for my wife. Get me a fly."

This demand for a commonplace hackney vehicle sounded rather like an anti-climax, after the young man's talk of blazing prairies and raging seas; but passionate reality has no ridiculous side, and Edward Arundel's most foolish words were sublime by reason of their earnestness.

"Get me a fly, Morrison," he said, grinding his heel upon the platform in the intensity of his impatience. "Or, stay; we should gain more in

the end if you were to go to the George—it's not ten minutes' walk from here; one of the porters will take you—the people there know me, and they'll let you have some vehicle, with a pair of horses and a clever driver. Tell them it's for an errand of life and death, and that Captain Arundel will pay them three times their usual price, or six times, if they wish. Tell them anything, so long as you get what we want."

The valet, an old servant of Edward Arundel's father, was carried away by the young man's mad impetuosity. The vitality of this broken-down invalid, whose physical weakness contrasted strangely with his mental energy, bore down upon the grave man-servant like an avalanche, and carried him whither it would. He was fain to abandon all hope of being true to the promises which he had given to Mrs. Arundel and the medical men, and to yield himself to the will of the fiery young soldier.

He left Edward Arundel sitting upon a chair in the solitary waiting-room, and hurried after the porter who had volunteered to show him the way to the George Inn, the most prosperous hotel in Swampington.

The valet had good reason to be astonished by

his young master's energy and determination; for Mary Marchmont's husband was as one rescued from the very jaws of death. For eleven weeks after that terrible concussion upon the South-Western Railway, Edward Arundel had lain in a state of coma,—helpless, mindless; all the story of his life blotted away, and his brain transformed into as blank a page as if he had been an infant lying on his mother's knees. A fractured skull had been the young Captain's chief share in those injuries which were dealt out pretty freely to the travellers in the Exeter mail on the 15th of August; and the young man had been conveyed to Dangerfield Park, whilst his father's corpse lay in stately solemnity in one of the chief rooms, almost as much a corpse as that dead father.

Mrs. Arundel's troubles had come, as the troubles of rich and prosperous people often do come, in a sudden avalanche, that threatened to overwhelm the tender-hearted matron. She had been summoned from Germany to attend her husband's deathbed; and she was called away from her faithful watch beside that deathbed, to hear tidings of the accident that had befallen her younger son.

Neither the Dorsetshire doctor who attended

the stricken traveller upon his homeward journey, and brought the strong man, helpless as a child, to claim the same tender devotion that had watched over his infancy, nor the Devonshire doctors who were summoned to Dangerfield, gave any hope of their patient's recovery. The sufferer might linger for years, they said; but his existence would be only a living death, a horrible blank, which it was a cruelty to wish prolonged. But when a great London surgeon appeared upon the scene, a new light, a wonderful gleam of hope, shone in upon the blackness of the mother's despair.

This great London surgeon, who was a very unassuming and matter-of-fact little man, and who seemed in a great hurry to earn his fee and run back to Saville Row by the next express, made a brief examination of the patient, asked a very few sharp and trenchant questions of the reverential provincial medical practitioners, and then declared that the chief cause of Edward Arundel's state lay in the fact that a portion of the skull was depressed,—a splinter pressed upon the brain.

The provincial practitioners opened their eyes very wide; and one of them ventured to mutter something to the effect that he had thought as

much for a long time. The London surgeon further stated, that until the pressure was removed from the patient's brain, Captain Edward Arundel would remain in precisely the same state as that into which he had fallen immediately upon the accident. The splinter could only be removed by a very critical operation, and this operation must be deferred until the patient's bodily strength was in some measure restored.

The surgeon gave brief but decisive directions to the provincial medical men as to the treatment of their patient during this interregnum, and then departed, after promising to return as soon as Captain Arundel was in a fit state for the operation. This period did not arrive till the first week in November, when the Devonshire doctors ventured to declare their patient's shattered frame in a great measure renovated by their devoted attention, and the tender care of the best of mothers.

The great surgeon came. The critical operation was performed, with such eminent success as to merit a very long description, which afterwards appeared in the *Lancet;* and slowly, like the gradual lifting of a curtain, the black shadows passed away from Edward Arundel's mind, and the memory of the past returned to him.

It was then that he raved madly about his young wife, perpetually demanding that she might be summoned to him; continually declaring that some great misfortune would befall her if she were not brought to his side, that, even in his feebleness, he might defend and protect her. His mother mistook his vehemence for the raving of delirium. The doctors fell into the same error, and treated him for brain-fever. It was only when the young soldier demonstrated to them that he could, by making an effort over himself, be as reasonable as they were, that he convinced them of their mistake. Then he begged to be left alone with his mother; and, with his feverish hands clasped in hers, asked her the meaning of her black dress, and the reason why his young wife had not come to him. He learned that his mother's mourning garments were worn in memory of his dead father. He learned also, after much bewilderment and passionate questioning, that no tidings of Mary Marchmont had ever come to Dangerfield.

It was then that the young man told his mother the story of his marriage: how that marriage had been contracted in haste, but with no real desire for secrecy; how he had, out of mere idleness, put

off writing to his friends until that last fatal night; and how, at the very moment when the pen was in his hand and the paper spread out before him, the different claims of a double duty had torn him asunder, and he had been summoned from the companionship of his bride to the deathbed of his father.

Mrs. Arundel tried in vain to set her son's mind at rest upon the subject of his wife's silence.

"No, mother!" he cried; "it is useless talking to me. You don't know my poor darling. She has the courage of a heroine, as well as the simplicity of a child. There has been some foul play at the bottom of this; it is treachery that has kept my wife from me. She would have come here on foot, had she been free to come. I know whose hand is in this business. Olivia Marchmont has kept my poor girl a prisoner; Olivia Marchmont has set herself between me and my darling!"

"But you don't know this, Edward. I'll write to Mr. Paulette; he will be able to tell us what has happened."

The young man writhed in a sudden paroxysm of mental agony.

"Write to Mr. Paulette!" he exclaimed. "No,

mother; there shall be no delay, no waiting for return-posts. That sort of torture would kill me in a few hours. No, mother; I will go to my wife by the first train that will take me on my way to Lincolnshire."

"You will go! You, Edward! in your state!"

There was a terrible outburst of remonstrance and entreaty on the part of the poor mother. Mrs Arundel went down upon her knees before her son, imploring him not to leave Dangerfield till his strength was recovered; imploring him to let her telegraph a summons to Richard Paulette; to let her go herself to Marchmont Towers in search of Mary; to do anything rather than carry out the one mad purpose that he was bent on,—the purpose of going himself to look for his wife.

The mother's tears and prayers were vain; no adamant was ever firmer than the young soldier.

"She is my wife, mother," he said; "I have sworn to protect and cherish her; and I have reason to think she has fallen into merciless hands. If I die upon the road, I must go to her. It is not a case in which I can do my duty by proxy. Every moment I delay is a

wrong to that poor helpless girl. Be reasonable, dear mother, I implore you; I should suffer fifty times more by the torture of suspense if I stayed here, than I can possibly suffer in a railraid journey from here to Lincolnshire."

The soldier's strong will triumphed over every opposition. The provincial doctors held up their hands, and protested against the madness of their patient; but without avail. All that either Mrs. Arundel or the doctors could do, was to make such preparations and arrangements as would render the weary journey easier; and it was under the mother's superintendence that the air-cushions, the brandy-flasks, the hartshorn, sal-volatile, and railway-rugs, had been provided for the Captain's comfort.

It was thus that, after a blank interval of three months, Edward Arundel, like some creature newly risen from the grave, returned to Swampington, upon his way to Marchmont Towers.

The delay seemed endless to this restless passenger, sitting in the empty waiting-room of the quiet Lincolnshire station, though the ostler and stable-boys at the "George" were bestirring them-

selves with good-will, urged on by Mr. Morrison's promises of liberal reward for their trouble, and though the man who was to drive the carriage lost no time in arraying himself for the journey. Captain Arundel looked at his watch three times while he sat in that dreary Swampington waiting-room. There was a clock over the mantelpiece, but he would not trust to that.

"Eight o'clock!" he muttered. "It will be ten before I get to the Towers, if the carriage doesn't come directly."

He got up, and walked from the waiting-room to the platform, and from the platform to the door of the station. He was so weak as to be obliged to support himself with his stick; and even with that help he tottered and reeled sometimes like a drunken man. But, in his eager impatience, he was almost unconscious of his own weakness.

"Will it never come?" he muttered. "Will it never come?"

At last, after an intolerable delay, as it seemed to the young man, the carriage-and-pair from the George Inn rattled up to the door of the station, with Mr. Morrison upon the box, and a postillion loosely balanced upon one of the long-legged,

long-backed, bony grey horses. Edward Arundel got into the vehicle before his valet could alight to assist him.

"Marchmont Towers!" he cried to the postillion; "and a five-pound note if you get there in less than an hour."

He flung some money to the officials who had gathered about the door to witness his departure, and who had eagerly pressed forward to render him that assistance which, even in his weakness, he disdained.

These men looked gravely at each other as the carriage dashed off into the fog, blundering and reeling as it went along the narrow half-made road, that led from the desert patch of waste ground upon which the station was built into the high-street of Swampington.

"Marchmont Towers!" said one of the men, in a tone that seemed to imply that there was something ominous even in the name of the Lincolnshire mansion. "What does *he* want at Marchmont Towers, I wonder?"

"Why, don't you know who he is, mate?" responded the other man, contemptuously.

"No."

"He's Parson Arundel's nevy,—the young

officer that some folks said ran away with the poor young miss oop at the Towers."

"My word! is he now? Why, I shouldn't ha' known him."

"No; he's a'most like the ghost of what he was, poor young chap. I've heerd as he was in that accident as happened last August on the Sou'-Western."

The railway official shrugged his shoulders.

"It's all a queer story," he said. "I can't make out naught about it; but I know *I* shouldn't care to go up to the Towers after dark."

Marchmont Towers had evidently fallen into rather evil repute amongst these simple Lincolnshire people.

The carriage in which Edward Arundel rode was a superannuated old chariot, whose uneasy springs rattled and shook the sick man to pieces. He groaned aloud every now and then from sheer physical agony; and yet I almost doubt if he knew that he suffered, so superior in its intensity was the pain of his mind to every bodily torture. Whatever consciousness he had of his racked and aching limbs was as nothing in comparison to the racking anguish of suspense, the intolerable

agony of anxiety, which seemed multiplied by every moment. He sat with his face turned towards the open window of the carriage, looking out steadily into the night. There was nothing before him but a blank darkness and thick fog, and a flat country blotted out by the falling rain; but he strained his eyes until the pupils dilated painfully, in his desire to recognise some landmark in the hidden prospect.

"*When* shall I get there?" he cried aloud, in a paroxysm of rage and grief. "My own one, my pretty one, my wife, when shall I get to you?"

He clenched his thin hands until the nails cut into his flesh. He stamped upon the floor of the carriage. He cursed the rusty, creaking springs, the slow-footed horses, the pools of water through which the wretched animals floundered pastern-deep. He cursed the darkness of the night, the stupidity of the postillion, the length of the way, —everything, and anything, that kept him back from the end which he wanted to reach.

At last the end came. The carriage drew up before the tall iron gates, behind which stretched, dreary and desolate as some patch of common-land, that melancholy waste which was called a park.

A light burned dimly in the lower window of the lodge,—a little spot that twinkled faintly red and luminous through the darkness and the rain; but the iron gates were as closely shut as if Marchmont Towers had been a prison-house. Edward Arundel was in no humour to linger long for the opening of those gates. He sprang from the carriage, reckless of the weakness of his cramped limbs, before the valet could descend from the rickety box-seat, or the postillion could get off his horse, and shook the wet and rusty iron bars with his own wasted hands. The gates rattled, but resisted the concussion; they had evidently been locked for the night. The young man seized an iron ring, dangling at the end of a chain, which hung beside one of the stone pillars, and rang a peal that resounded like an alarm-signal through the darkness. A fierce watchdog far away in the distance howled dismally at the summons, and the dissonant shriek of a peacock sounded across the flat.

The door of the lodge was opened about five minutes after the bell had rung, and an old man peered out into the night, holding a candle shaded by his feeble hand, and looking suspiciously towards the gate.

"Who is it?" he said.

"It is I, Captain Arundel. Open the gate, please."

The man, who was very old, and whose intellect seemed to have grown as dim and foggy as the night itself, reflected for a few moments, and then mumbled,—

"Cap'en Arundel! Ay, to be sure, to be sure. Parson Arundel's nevy; ay, ay."

He went back into the lodge, to the disgust and aggravation of the young soldier, who rattled fiercely at the gate once more in his impatience. But the old man emerged presently, as tranquil as if the blank November night had been some sunshiny noontide in July, carrying a lantern and a bunch of keys, one of which he proceeded in a leisurely manner to apply to the great lock of the gate.

"Let me in!" cried Edward Arundel. "Man alive! do you think I came down here to stand all night staring through these iron bars? Is Marchmont Towers a prison, that you shut your gates as if they were never to be opened until the Day of Judgment?"

The old man responded with a feeble, chirpy laugh, an audible grin, senile and conciliatory.

"We've no need to 'keep t' geates open arter

dark," he said; "folk doan't coome to the Toowers arter dark."

He had succeeded by this time in turning the key in the lock; one of the gates rolled slowly back upon its rusty hinges, creaking and groaning as if in hoarse protest against all visitors to the Towers; and Edward Arundel entered the dreary domain which John Marchmont had inherited from his kinsman.

The postillion turned his horses from the high-road without the gates into the broad drive leading up to the mansion. Far away, across the wet flats, the broad western front of that gaunt stone dwelling-place frowned upon the travellers, its black grimness only relieved by two or three dim red patches, that told of lighted windows and human habitation. It was rather difficult to associate friendly flesh and blood with Marchmont Towers on this dark November night. The nervous traveller would have rather expected to find diabolical denizens lurking within those black and stony walls; hideous enchantments beneath that rain-bespattered roof; weird and incarnate horrors brooding by deserted hearths, and fearful shrieks of souls in perpetual pain breaking upon the stillness of the night.

Edward Arundel had no thought of these things. He knew that the place was darksome and gloomy, and that, in very spite of himself, he had always been unpleasantly impressed by it; but he knew nothing more. He only wanted to reach the house without delay, and to ask for the young wife whom he had parted with upon a balmy August evening three months before. He wanted this passionately, almost madly; and every moment made his impatience wilder, his anxiety more intense. It seemed as if all the journey from Dangerfield Park to Lincolnshire was as nothing compared to the space that still lay between him and Marchmont Towers.

"We've done it in double-quick time, sir," the postillion said, complacently pointing to the steaming sides of his horses. "Master 'll gie it to me for driving the beasts like this."

Edward Arundel looked at the panting animals. They had brought him quickly, then, though the way had seemed so long.

"You shall have a five-pound note, my lad," he said, "if you get me up to yonder house in five minutes."

He had his hand upon the door of the carriage, and was leaning against it for support, while he

tried to recover enough strength with which to clamber into the vehicle, when his eye was caught by some white object flapping in the rain against the stone pillar of the gate, and made dimly visible in a flickering patch of light from the lodge-keeper's lantern.

"What's that?" he cried, pointing to this white spot upon the moss-grown stone.

The old man slowly raised his eyes to the spot towards which the soldier's finger pointed.

"That?" he mumbled. "Ay, to be sure, to be sure. Poor young lady! That's the printed bill as they stook oop. It's the printed bill, to be sure, to be sure. I'd a'most forgot it. It ain't been much good, anyhow; and I'd a'most forgot it."

"The printed bill! the young lady!" gasped Edward Arundel, in a hoarse, choking voice.

He snatched the lantern from the lodge-keeper's hand with a force that sent the old man reeling and tottering several paces backward; and, rushing to the stone pillar, held the light up above his head, on a level with the white placard which had attracted his notice. It was damp and dilapidated at the edges; but that which was printed upon it was as visible to the soldier as though each commonplace character

had been a fiery sign inscribed upon a blazing scroll.

This was the announcement which Edward Arundel, read upon the gate-post of Marchmont Towers :—

"ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.—Whereas Miss Mary Marchmont left her home on Wednesday last, October 17th, and has not since been heard of, this is to give notice that the above reward will be given to any one who shall afford such information as will lead to her recovery if she be alive, or to the discovery of her body if she be dead. The missing young lady is eighteen years of age, rather below the middle height, of fair complexion, light-brown hair, and hazel eyes. When she left her home, she had on a grey silk dress, grey shawl, and straw bonnet. She was last seen near the river-side upon the afternoon of Wednesday, the 17th instant.

"*Marchmont Towers, October* 20*th*, 1848."

CHAPTER VII.

FACE TO FACE.

It is not easy to imagine a lion-hearted young cavalry officer, whose soldiership in the Punjaub had won the praises of a Napier and an Outram, fainting away like a heroine of romance at the coming of evil tidings; but Edward Arundel, who had risen from a sick-bed to take a long and fatiguing journey in utter defiance of the doctors, was not strong enough to bear the dreadful welcome that greeted him upon the gate-post at Marchmont Towers.

He staggered, and would have fallen, had not the extended arms of his father's confidential servant been luckily opened to receive and support him. But he did not lose his senses.

"Get me into the carriage, Morrison," he cried. "Get me up to that house. They've tortured and tormented my wife while I've been lying like a log on my bed at Dangerfield. For God's sake, get me up there as quick as you can!"

Mr. Morrison had read the placard on the gate across his young master's shoulder. He lifted the Captain into the carriage, shouted to the postillion to drive on, and took his seat by the young man's side.

"Begging you pardon, Mr. Edward," he said, gently; "but the young lady may be found by this time. That bill's been sticking there for upwards of a month, you see, sir, and it isn't likely but what Miss Marchmont has been found between that time and this."

The invalid passed his hand across his forehead, down which the cold sweat rolled in great beads.

"Give me some brandy," he whispered; "pour some brandy down my throat, Morrison, if you've any compassion upon me; I must get strength somehow for the struggle that lies before me."

The valet took a wicker-covered flask from his pocket, and put the neck of it to Edward Arundel's lips.

"She may be found, Morrison," muttered the young man, after drinking a long draught of the fiery spirit; he would willingly have drunk living fire itself, in his desire to obtain unnatural strength in this crisis. "Yes; you're right there. She

may be found. But to think that she should have been driven away! To think that my poor, helpless, tender girl should have been driven a second time from the home that is her own! Yes; her own by every law and every right. Oh, the relentless devil, the pitiless devil!—what can be the motive of her conduct? Is it madness, or the infernal cruelty of a fiend incarnate?"

Mr. Morrison thought that his young master's brain had been disordered by the shock he had just undergone, and that this wild talk was mere delirium.

"Keep your heart up, Mr. Edward," he murmured, soothingly; "you may rely upon it, the young lady has been found."

But Edward was in no mind to listen to any mild consolatory remarks from his valet. He had thrust his head out of the carriage-window, and his eyes were fixed upon the dimly-lighted casements of the western drawing-room.

"The room in which John and Polly and I used to sit together when first I came from India," he murmured. "How happy we were!—how happy we were!"

The carriage stopped before the stone portico, and the young man got out once more, assisted

by his servant. His breath came short and quick now that he stood upon the threshold. He pushed aside the servant who opened the familiar door at the summons of the clanging bell, and strode into the hall. A fire burned on the wide hearth; but the atmosphere of the great stone-paved chamber was damp and chilly.

Captain Arundel walked straight to the door of the western drawing-room. It was there that he had seen lights in the windows; it was there that he expected to find Olivia Marchmont.

He was not mistaken. A shaded lamp burnt dimly on a table near the fire. There was a low invalid-chair beside this table, an open book upon the floor, and an Indian shawl, one he had sent to his cousin, flung carelessly upon the pillows. The neglected fire burned low in the old-fashioned grate, and above the dull-red blaze stood the figure of a woman, tall, dark, and gloomy of aspect.

It was Olivia Marchmont, in the mourning-robes that she had worn, with but one brief intermission, ever since her husband's death. Her profile was turned towards the door by which Edward Arundel entered the room; her eyes were bent steadily upon the low heap of

burning ashes in the grate. Even in that doubtful light the young man could see that her features were sharpened, and that a settled frown had contracted her straight black brows.

In her fixed attitude, in her air of deathlike tranquillity, this woman resembled some sinful vestal sister, set, against her will, to watch a sacred fire, and brooding moodily over her crimes.

She did not hear the opening of the door; she had not even heard the trampling of the horses' hoofs, or the crashing of the wheels upon the gravel before the house. There were times when her sense of external things was, as it were, suspended and absorbed in the intensity of her obstinate despair.

"Olivia!" said the soldier.

Mrs. Marchmont looked up at the sound of that accusing voice, for there was something in Edward Arundel's simple enunciation of her name which seemed like an accusation or a menace. She looked up, with a great terror in her face, and stared aghast at her unexpected visitor. Her white cheeks, her trembling lips, and dilated eyes could not have more palpably expressed a great and absorbing horror, had the young man standing

quietly before her been a corpse newly risen from its grave.

"Olivia Marchmont," said Captain Arundel, after a brief pause, "I have come here to look for my wife."

The woman pushed her trembling hands across her forehead, brushing the dead black hair from her temples, and still staring with the same unutterable horror at the face of her cousin. Several times she tried to speak; but the broken syllables died away in her throat in hoarse, inarticulate mutterings. At last, with a great effort, the words came.

"I—I—never expected to see you," she said; "I heard that you were very ill; I heard that you——"

"You heard that I was dying," interrupted Edward Arundel; "or that, if I lived, I should drag out the rest of my existence in hopeless idiocy. The doctors thought as much a week ago, when one of them, cleverer than the rest I suppose, had the courage to perform an operation that restored me to consciousness. Sense and memory came back to me by degrees. The thick veil that had shrouded the past was rent asunder; and the first image that came to me was the

image of my young wife, as I had seen her upon the night of our parting. For more than three months I had been dead. I was suddenly restored to life. I asked those about me to give me tidings of my wife. Had she sought me out?—had she followed me to Dangerfield? No! They could tell me nothing. They thought that I was delirious, and tried to soothe me with compassionate speeches, merciful falsehoods, promising me that I should see my darling. But I soon read the secret of their scared looks. I saw pity and wonder mingled in my mother's face, and I entreated her to be merciful to me, and to tell me the truth. She had compassion upon me, and told me all she knew, which was very little. She had never heard from my wife. She had never heard of any marriage between Mary Marchmont and me. The only communication which she had received from any of her Lincolnshire relations had been a letter from my uncle Hubert, in reply to one of hers telling him of my hopeless state.

"This was the shock that fell upon me when life and memory came back. I could not bear the imprisonment of a sick-bed. I felt that for the second time I must go out into the world

to look for my darling; and in defiance of the doctors, in defiance of my poor mother, who thought that my departure from Dangerfield was a suicide, I am here. It is here that I come first to seek for my wife. I might have stopped in London to see Richard Paulette; I might sooner have gained tidings of my darling. But I came here; I came here without stopping by the way, because an uncontrollable instinct and an unreasoning impulse tells me that it is here I ought to seek her. I am here, her husband, her only true and legitimate defender; and woe be to those who stand between me and my wife!"

He had spoken rapidly in his passion; and he stopped, exhausted by his own vehemence, and sank heavily into a chair near the lamplit table.

Then for the first time that night Olivia Marchmont plainly saw her cousin's face, and saw the terrible change that had transformed the handsome young soldier, since the bright August morning on which he had gone forth from Marchmont Towers. She saw the traces of a long and wearisome illness sadly visible in his waxen-hued complexion, his hollow cheeks, the faded lustre of his eyes, his dry and pallid lips. She saw all this, the woman whose one great sin had been to love this

man wickedly and madly, in spite of her better self, in spite of her womanly pride; she saw the change in him that had altered him from a young Apollo to a shattered and broken invalid. And did any revulsion of feeling arise in her breast? Did any corresponding transformation in her own heart bear witness to the baseness of her love?

No; a thousand times, no! There was no thrill of disgust, how transient soever; not so much as one passing shudder of painful surprise, one pang of womanly regret. No! In place of these, a passionate yearning arose in this woman's haughty soul; a flood of sudden tenderness rushed across the black darkness of her mind. She fain would have flung herself upon her knees, in loving self-abasement, at the sick man's feet. She fain would have cried aloud, amid a tempest of passionate sobs,—

"O my love, my love! you are dearer to me a hundred times by this cruel change. It was *not* your bright-blue eyes and waving chestnut hair,—it was not your handsome face, your brave, soldier-like bearing that I loved. My love was not so base as that. I inflicted a cruel outrage upon myself when I thought that I was the weak fool of a handsome face. Whatever *I* have been, my

love, at least, has been pure. My love is pure, though I am base. I will never slander that again, for I know now that it is immortal."

In the sudden rush of that flood-tide of love and tenderness, all these thoughts welled into Olivia Marchmont's mind. In all her sin and desperation she had never been so true a woman as now; she had never, perhaps, been so near being a good woman. But the tender emotion was swept out of her breast the next moment by the first words of Edward Arundel.

"Why do you not answer my question?" he said.

She drew herself up in the erect and rigid attitude that had become almost habitual to her. Every trace of womanly feeling faded out of her face, as the sunlight disappears behind the sudden darkness of a thundercloud.

"What question?" she asked, with icy indifference.

"The question I have come to Lincolnshire to ask—the question I have perilled my life, perhaps, to ask," cried the young man. "Where is my wife?"

The widow turned upon him with a horrible smile.

"I never heard that you were married," she said. "Who is your wife?"

"Mary Marchmont, the mistress of this house."

Olivia opened her eyes, and looked at him in half-sardonic surprise.

"Then it was not a fable?" she said.

"What was not a fable?"

"The unhappy girl spoke the truth when she said that you had married her at some out-of-the-way church in Lambeth."

"The truth! Yes!" cried Edward Arundel. "Who should dare to say that she spoke other than the truth? Who should dare to disbelieve her?"

Olivia Marchmont smiled again,—that same strange smile which was almost too horrible for humanity, and yet had a certain dark and gloomy grandeur of its own. Satan, the star of the morning, may have so smiled despairing defiance upon the Archangel Michael.

"Unfortunately," she said, "no one believed the poor child. Her story was such a very absurd one, and she could bring forward no shred of evidence in support of it."

"O my God!" ejaculated Edward Arundel, clasping his hands above his head in a paroxysm of rage and despair. "I see it all—I see it all! My darling has been tortured to death. Woman!"

he cried, "are you possessed by a thousand fiends? Is there no one sentiment of womanly compassion left in your breast? If there is one spark of womanhood in your nature, I appeal to that; I ask you what has happened to my wife?"

"My wife! my wife!" The reiteration of that familiar phrase was to Olivia Marchmont like the perpetual thrust of a dagger aimed at an open wound. It struck every time upon the same tortured spot, and inflicted the same agony.

"The placard upon the gates of this place can tell you as much as I can," she said.

The ghastly whiteness of the soldier's face told her that he had seen the placard of which she spoke.

"She has not been found, then?" he said, hoarsely.

"No."

"How did she disappear?"

"As she disappeared upon the morning on which you followed her. She wandered out of the house, this time leaving no letter, nor message, nor explanation of any kind whatever. It was in the middle of the day that she went out; and for some time her absence caused no alarm. But, after some hours, she was waited for and

watched for very anxiously. Then a search was made."

"Where?"

"Wherever she had at any time been in the habit of walking,—in the park: in the wood; along the narrow path by the water; at Pollard's farm; at Hester's house at Kemberling,—in every place where it might be reasonably imagined there was the slightest chance of finding her."

"And all this was without result?"

"It was."

"*Why* did she leave this place? God help you, Olivia Marchmont, if it was your cruelty that drove her away!"

The widow took no notice of the threat implied in these words. Was there anything upon earth that she feared now? No—nothing. Had she not endured the worst long ago, in Edward Arundel's contempt? She had no fear of a battle with this man; or with any other creature in the world; or with the whole world arrayed and banded together against her, if need were. Amongst all the torments of those black depths to which her soul had gone down, there was no such thing as fear. That cowardly baseness is for the happy and prosperous, who have something to lose.

This woman was by nature dauntless and resolute as the hero of some classic story; but in her despair she had the desperate and reckless courage of a starving wolf. The hand of death was upon her; what could it matter how she died?

"I am very grateful to you, Edward Arundel," she said, bitterly, "for the good opinion you have always had of me. The blood of the Dangerfield Arundels must have had some drop of poison intermingled with it, I should think, before it could produce so vile a creature as myself; and yet I have heard people say that my mother was a good woman."

The young man writhed impatiently beneath the torture of his cousin's deliberate speech. Was there to be no end to this unendurable delay? Even now,—now that he was in this house, face to face with the woman he had come to question —it seemed as if he *could* not get tidings of his wife.

So, often in his dreams, he had headed a besieging-party against the Affghans, with the scaling-ladders reared against the wall; he had seen the dark faces grinning down upon him—all savage glaring eyes and fierce glistening teeth—and had heard the voices of his men urging him

on to the encounter, but had felt himself paralysed and helpless, with his sabre weak as a withered reed in his nerveless hand.

"For God's sake, let there be no quarrelling with phrases between you and me, Olivia!" he cried. "If you or any other living being have injured my wife, the reckoning between us shall be no light one. But there will be time enough to talk of that by-and-by. I stand before you, newly risen from a grave in which I have lain for more than three months, as dead to the world, and to every creature I have ever loved or hated, as if the Funeral Service had been read over my coffin. I come to demand from you an account of what has happened during that interval. If you palter or prevaricate with me, I shall know that it is because you fear to tell me the truth."

"Fear!"

"Yes; you have good reason to fear, if you have wronged Mary Arundel. Why did she leave this house?"

"Because she was not happy in it, I suppose. She chose to shut herself up in her own room, and to refuse to be governed, or advised, or consoled. I tried to do my duty to her; yes," cried Olivia Marchmont, suddenly raising her voice, as if she

had been vehemently contradicted;—"yes, I did try to do my duty to her. I urged her to listen to reason; I begged her to abandon her foolish falsehood about a marriage with you in London."

"You disbelieved in that marriage?"

"I did," answered Olivia.

"You lie!" cried Edward Arundel. "You knew the poor child had spoken the truth. You knew her—you knew me—well enough to know that I should not have detained her away from her home an hour, except to make her my wife—except to give myself the strongest right to love and defend her."

"I knew nothing of the kind, Captain Arundel; you and Mary Marchmont had taken good care to keep your secrets from me. I knew nothing of your plots, your intentions. *I* should have considered that one of the Dangerfield Arundels would have thought his honour sullied by such an act as a stolen marriage with an heiress, considerably under age, and nominally in the guardianship of her stepmother. I did, therefore, disbelieve the story Mary Marchmont told me. Another person, much more experienced than I, also disbelieved the unhappy girl's account of her absence."

"Another person! What other person?"

"Mr. Marchmont."

"Mr. Marchmont!"

"Yes; Paul Marchmont,—my husband's first-cousin."

A sudden cry of rage and grief broke from Edward Arundel's lips.

"O my God!" he exclaimed, "there was some foundation for the warning in John Marchmont's letter, after all. And I laughed at him; I laughed at my poor friend's fears."

The widow looked at her kinsman in mute wonder.

"Has Paul Marchmont been in this house?" he asked.

"Yes."

"When was he here?"

"He has been here often; he comes here constantly. He has been living at Kemberling for the last three months."

"Why?"

"For his own pleasure, I suppose," Olivia answered haughtily. "It is no business of mine to pry into Mr. Marchmont's motives."

Edward Arundel ground his teeth in an access of ungovernable passion. It was not against

Olivia, but against himself this time that he was enraged. He hated himself for the arrogant folly, the obstinate presumption, with which he had ridiculed and slighted John Marchmont's vague fears of his kinsman Paul.

"So this man has been here,—is here constantly," he muttered. "Of course, it is only natural that he should hang about the place. And you and he are stanch allies, I suppose?" he added, turning upon Olivia.

"Stanch allies! Why?"

"Because you both hate my wife."

"What do you mean?"

"You both hate her. You, out of a base envy of her wealth; because of her superior rights, which made you a secondary person in this house, perhaps,—there is nothing else for which you *could* hate her. Paul Marchmont, because she stands between him and a fortune. Heaven help her! Heaven help my poor, gentle, guileless darling! Surely Heaven must have had some pity upon her when her husband was not by!"

The young man dashed the blinding tears from his eyes. They were the first that he had shed since he had risen from that which many people had thought his dying-bed, to search for his wife.

But this was no time for tears or lamentations. Stern determination took the place of tender pity and sorrowful love. It was a time for resolution and promptitude.

"Olivia Marchmont," he said, "there has been some foul play in this business. My wife has been missing a month; yet when I asked my mother what had happened at this house during my illness, she could tell me nothing. Why did you not write to tell her of Mary's flight?"

"Because Mrs. Arundel has never done me the honour to cultivate any intimacy between us. My father writes to his sister-in-law sometimes; I scarcely ever write to my aunt. On the other hand, your mother had never seen Mary Marchmont, and could not be expected to take any great interest in her proceedings. There was, therefore, no reason for my writing a special letter to announce the trouble that had befallen me."

"You might have written to my mother about my marriage. You might have applied to her for confirmation of the story which you disbelieved."

Olivia Marchmont smiled.

"Should I have received that confirmation?"

she said. "No. I saw your mother's letters to my father. There was no mention in those letters of any marriage; no mention whatever of Mary Marchmont. This in itself was enough to confirm my disbelief. Was it reasonable to imagine that you would have married, and yet have left your mother in total ignorance of the fact?"

"O God, help me!" cried Edward Arundel, wringing his hands. "It seems as if my own folly, my own vile procrastination, have brought this trouble upon my wife. Olivia Marchmont, have pity upon me. If you hate this girl, your malice must surely have been satisfied by this time. She has suffered enough. Pity me, and help me; if you have any human feeling in your breast. She left this house because her life here had grown unendurable; because she saw herself doubted, disbelieved, widowed in the first month of her marriage, utterly desolate and friendless. Another woman might have borne up against all this misery. Another woman would have known how to assert herself, and to defend herself, even in the midst of her sorrow and desolation. But my poor darling is a child; a baby in ignorance of the world. How should *she* protect herself against her enemies?

Her only instinct was to run away from her persecutors,—to hide herself from those whose pretended doubts flung the horror of dishonour upon her. I can understand all now; I can understand. Olivia Marchmont, this man Paul has a strong reason for being a villain. The motives that have induced you to do wrong must be very small in comparison to his. He plays an infamous game, I believe; but he plays for a high stake."

A high stake! Had not *she* perilled her soul upon the casting of this die? Had *she* not flung down her eternal happiness in that fatal game of hazard?

"Help me, then, Olivia," said Edward, imploringly; "help me to find my wife; and atone for all that you have ever done amiss in the past. It is not too late."

His voice softened as he spoke. He turned to her, with his hands clasped, waiting anxiously for her answer. Perhaps this appeal was the last cry of her good angel, pleading against the devils for her redemption. But the devils had too long held possession of this woman's breast. They arose, arrogant and unpitying, and hardened her heart against that pleading voice.

"How much he loves her!" thought Olivia Marchmont; "how dearly he loves her! For her sake he humiliates himself to me."

Then, with no show of relenting in her voice or manner, she said deliberately:

"I can only tell you again what I told you before. The placard you saw at the park-gates can tell you as much as I can. Mary Marchmont ran away. She was sought for in every direction, but without success. Mr. Marchmont, who is a man of the world, and better able to suggest what is right in such a case as this, advised that Mr. Paulette should be sent for. He was accordingly communicated with. He came, and instituted a fresh search. He also caused a bill to be printed and distributed through the country. Advertisements were inserted in the 'Times' and other papers. For some reason—I forget what reason—Mary Marchmont's name did not appear in these advertisements. They were so worded as to render the publication of the name unnecessary."

Edward Arundel pushed his hand across his forehead.

"Richard Paulette has been here?" he murmured, in a low voice.

He had every confidence in the lawyer; and a deadly chill came over him at the thought that the cool, hard-headed solicitor had failed to find the missing girl.

"Yes; he was here two or three days."

"And he could do nothing?"

"Nothing, except what I have told you."

The young man thrust his hand into his breast to still the cruel beating of his heart. A sudden terror had taken possession of him, —a horrible dread that he should never look upon his young wife's face again. For some minutes there was a dead silence in the room, only broken once or twice by the falling of some ashes on the hearth. Captain Arundel sat with his face hidden behind his hand. Olivia still stood as she had stood when her cousin entered the room, erect and gloomy, by the old-fashioned chimney-piece.

"There was something in that placard," the soldier said at last, in a hoarse, altered voice,— "there was something about my wife having been seen last by the water-side. Who saw her there?"

"Mr. Weston, a surgeon of Kemberling,—Paul Marchmont's brother-in-law."

"Was she seen by no one else?"

"Yes; she was seen at about the same time—a little sooner or later, we don't know which—by one of Farmer Pollard's men."

"And she has never been seen since?"

"Never; that is to say, we can hear of no one who has seen her."

"At what time in the day was she seen by this Mr. Weston?"

"At dusk; between five and six o'clock."

Edward Arundel put his hand suddenly to his throat, as if to check some choking sensation that prevented his speaking.

"Olivia," he said, "my wife was last seen by the river-side. Does any one think that, by any unhappy accident, by any terrible fatality, she lost her way after dark, and fell into the water? or that—O God, that would be too horrible!—does any one suspect that she drowned herself?"

"Many things have been said since her disappearance," Olivia Marchmont answered. "Some people say one thing, some another."

"And it has been said that she—that she was drowned?"

"Yes; many people have said so. The river was dragged while Mr. Paulette was here, and

after he went away. The men were at work with the drags for more than a week.

"And they found nothing?"

"Nothing."

"Was there any other reason for supposing that—that my wife fell into the river?"

"Only one reason."

"What was that?"

"I will show you," Olivia Marchmont answered.

She took a bunch of keys from her pocket, and went to an old-fashioned bureau or cabinet upon the other side of the room. She unlocked the upper part of this bureau, opened one of the drawers, and took from it something which she brought to Edward Arundel.

This something was a little shoe; a little shoe of soft bronzed leather, stained and discoloured with damp and moss, and trodden down upon one side, as if the wearer had walked a weary way in it, and had been unaccustomed to so much walking.

Edward Arundel remembered, in that brief, childishly-happy honeymoon at the little village near Winchester, how often he had laughed at his young wife's propensity for walking about damp meadows in such delicate little slippers as were

better adapted to the requirements of a ball-room. He remembered the slender foot, so small that he could take it in his hand; the feeble little foot that had grown tired in long wanderings by the Hampshire trout-streams, but which had toiled on in heroic self-abnegation so long as it was the will of the sultan to pedestrianise.

"Was this found by the river-side?" he asked, looking piteously at the slipper which Mrs. Marchmont had put into his hand.

"Yes; it was found amongst the rushes on the shore, a mile below the spot at which Mr. Weston saw my step-daughter."

Edward Arundel put the little shoe into his bosom.

"I'll not believe it," he cried suddenly; "I'll not believe that my darling is lost to me. She was too good, far too good, to think of suicide; and Providence would never suffer my poor lonely child to be led away to a dreary death upon that dismal river-shore. No, no; she fled away from this place because she was too wretched here. She went away to hide herself amongst those whom she could trust, until her husband came to claim her. I will believe anything in the world except that she is lost to me. And I will not

believe that, I will never believe that, until I look down at her corpse; until I lay my hand on her cold breast, and feel that her true heart has ceased beating. As I went out of this place four months ago to look for her, I will go again now. My darling, my darling, my innocent pet, my childish bride; I will go to the very end of the world in search of you."

The widow ground her teeth as she listened to her kinsman's passionate words. Why did he for ever goad her to blacker wickedness by this parade of his love for Mary? Why did he force her to remember every moment how much cause she had to hate this pale-faced girl?

Captain Arundel rose, and walked a few paces, leaning on his stick as he went.

"You will sleep here to-night, of course?" Olivia Marchmont said.

"Sleep here!"

His tone expressed plainly enough that the place was abhorrent to him.

"Yes; where else should you stay?"

"I meant to have stopped at the nearest inn."

"The nearest inn is at Kemberling."

"That would suit me well enough," the young man answered indifferently; "I must be in Kem-

berling early to-morrow, for I must see Paul Marchmont. I am no nearer the comprehension of my wife's flight by anything that you have told me. It is to Paul Marchmont that I must look next. Heaven help him if he tries to keep the truth from me."

"You will see Mr. Marchmont here as easily as at Kemberling," Olivia answered; "he comes here every day."

"What for?"

"He has built a sort of painting-room down by the river-side, and he paints there whenever there is light."

"Indeed!" cried Edward Arundel; "he makes himself at home at Marchmont Towers, then?"

"He has a right to do so, I suppose," answered the widow indifferently. "If Mary Marchmont is dead, this place and all belonging to it is his. As it is, I am only here on sufferance."

"He has taken possession, then?"

"On the contrary, he shrinks from doing so."

"And, by the Heaven above us, he does wisely," cried Edward Arundel. "No man shall seize upon that which belongs to my darling. No foul plot of this artist-traitor shall rob her of her own. God knows how little value *I* set upon

her wealth; but I will stand between her and those who try to rob her, until my last gasp. No, Olivia; I'll not stay here; I'll accept no hospitality from Mr. Marchmont. I suspect him too much."

He walked to the door; but before he reached it the widow went to one of the windows, and pushed aside the blind.

"Look at the rain," she said; "hark at it; don't you hear it, drip, drip, drip upon the stone? I wouldn't turn a dog out of doors upon such a night as this; and you—you are so ill—so weak. Edward Arundel, do you hate me so much that you refuse to share the same shelter with me, even for a night?"

There is nothing so difficult of belief to a man, who is not a coxcomb, as the simple fact that he is beloved by a woman whom he does not love, and has never wooed by word or deed. But for this, surely Edward Arundel must, in that sudden burst of tenderness, that one piteous appeal, have discovered a clue to his cousin's secret.

He discovered nothing; he guessed nothing. But he was touched by her tone, even in spite of his utter ignorance of its meaning, and he replied, in an altered manner,

"Certainly, Olivia, if you really wish it, I will stay. Heaven knows I have no desire that you and I should be ill friends. I want your help; your pity, perhaps. I am quite willing to believe that any cruel things you said to Mary arose from an outbreak of temper. I cannot think that you could be base at heart. I will even attribute your disbelief of the statement made by my poor girl as to our marriage to the narrow prejudices learnt in a small country town. Let us be friends, Olivia."

He held out his hand. His cousin laid her cold fingers in his open palm, and he shuddered as if he had come in contact with a corpse. There was nothing very cordial in the salutation. The two hands seemed to drop asunder, lifeless and inert; as if to bear mute witness that between these two people there was no possibility of sympathy or union.

But Captain Arundel accepted his cousin's hospitality. Indeed he had need to do so; for he found that his valet had relied upon his master's stopping at the Towers, and had sent the carriage back to Swampington. A tray with cold meat and wine was brought into the drawing-room for the young soldier's refreshment. He drank a glass

of Madeira, and made some pretence of eating a few mouthfuls, out of courtesy to Olivia; but he did this almost mechanically. He sat silent and gloomy, brooding over the terrible shock that he had so newly received; brooding over the hidden things that had happened in that dreary interval, during which he had been as powerless to defend his wife from trouble as a dead man.

Again and again the cruel thought returned to him, each time with a fresh agony,—that if he had written to his mother, if he had told her the story of his marriage, the things which had happened could never have come to pass. Mary would have been sheltered and protected by a good and loving woman. This thought, this horrible self-reproach, was the bitterest thing the young man had to bear.

"It is too great a punishment," he thought; "I am too cruelly punished for having forgotten everything in my happiness with my darling."

The widow sat in her low easy-chair near the fire, with her eyes fixed upon the burning coals; the grate had been replenished, and the light of the red blaze shone full upon Olivia Marchmont's haggard face. Edward Arundel, aroused for a few

moments out of his gloomy abstraction, was surprised at the change which an interval of a few months had made in his cousin. The gloomy shadow which he had often seen on her face had become a fixed expression; every line had deepened, as if by the wear and tear of ten years, rather than by the progress of a few months. Olivia Marchmont had grown old before her time. Nor was this the only change. There was a look, undefined and undefinable, in the large luminous grey eyes, unnaturally luminous now, which filled Edward Arundel with a vague sense of terror; a terror which he would not—which he dared not—attempt to analyse. He remembered Mary's unreasoning fear of her stepmother, and he now scarcely wondered at that fear. There was something almost weird and unearthly in the aspect of the woman sitting opposite to him by the broad hearth: no vestige of colour in her gloomy face, a strange light burning in her eyes, and her black draperies falling round her in straight, lustreless folds.

"I fear you have been ill, Olivia," the young man said, presently.

Another sentiment had arisen in his breast side by side with that vague terror,—a fancy

that perhaps there was some reason why his cousin should be pitied.

"Yes," she answered indifferently; as if no subject of which Captain Arundel could have spoken would have been of less concern to her,—"yes, I have been very ill."

"I am sorry to hear it."

Olivia looked up at him and smiled. Her smile was the strangest he had ever seen upon a woman's face.

"I am very sorry to hear it. What has been the matter with you?"

"Slow fever, Mr. Weston said."

"Mr. Weston?"

"Yes; Mr. Marchmont's brother-in-law. He has succeeded to Mr. Dawnfield's practice at Kemberling. He attended me, and he attended my step-daughter."

"My wife was ill, then?"

"Yes; she had brain-fever: she recovered from that, but she did not recover strength. Her low spirits alarmed me, and I considered it only right—Mr. Marchmont suggested also—that a medical man should be consulted."

"And what did this man, this Mr. Weston, say?"

"Very little; there was nothing the matter with Mary, he said. He gave her a little medicine, but only in the desire of strengthening her nervous system. He could give her no medicine that would have any very good effect upon her spirits, while she chose to keep herself obstinately apart from every one."

The young man's head sank upon his breast. The image of his desolate young wife arose before him; the image of a pale, sorrowful girl, holding herself apart from her persecutors, abandoned, lonely, despairing. Why had she remained at Marchmont Towers? Why had she ever consented to go there, when she had again and again expressed such terror of her stepmother? Why had she not rather followed her husband down to Devonshire, and thrown herself upon his relatives for protection? Was it like this girl to remain quietly here in Lincolnshire, when the man she loved with such innocent devotion was lying between life and death in the west?

"She is such a child," he thought,—"such a child in her ignorance of the world. I must not reason about her as I would about another woman."

And then a sudden flush of passionate emotion

rose to his face, as a new thought flashed into his mind. What if this helpless girl had been detained by force at Marchmont Towers?

"Olivia," he cried, "whatever baseness this man, Paul Marchmont, may be capable of, you at least must be superior to any deliberate sin. I have all my life believed in you, and respected you as a good woman. Tell me the truth, then, for pity's sake. Nothing that you can tell me will fill up the dead blank that the horrible interval since my accident has made in my life. But you can give me some help. A few words from you may clear away much of this darkness. How did you find my wife? How did you induce her to come back to this place? I know that she had an unreasonable dread of returning here."

"I found her through the agency of Mr. Marchmont," Olivia answered, quietly. "I had some difficulty in inducing her to return here; but after hearing of your accident—"

"How was the news of that broken to her?"

"Unfortunately she saw a paper that had happened to be left in her way."

"By whom?"

"By Mr. Marchmont."

"Where was this?"

"In Hampshire."

"Indeed! Then Paul Marchmont went with you to Hampshire?"

"He did. He was of great service to me in this crisis. After seeing the paper, my step-daughter was seized with brain-fever. She was unconscious when we brought her back to the Towers. She was nursed by my old servant Barbara, and had the highest medical care. I do not think that anything more could have been done for her."

"No," answered Edward Arundel, bitterly; "unless you could have loved her."

"We cannot force our affections," the widow said, in a hard voice.

Another voice in her breast seemed to whisper, "Why do you reproach me for not having loved this girl? If you had loved *me*, the whole world would have been different."

"Olivia Marchmont," said Captain Arundel, "by your own avowal there has never been any affection for this orphan girl in your heart. It is not my business to dwell upon the fact, as something almost unnatural under the peculiar circumstances through which that helpless child was cast upon your protection. It is needless to try to under-

stand why you have hardened your heart against my poor wife. Enough that it is so. But I may still believe that, whatever your feelings may be towards your dead husband's daughter, you would not be guilty of any deliberate act of treachery against her. I can afford to believe this of you; but I cannot believe it of Paul Marchmont. That man is my wife's natural enemy. If he has been here during my illness, he has been here to plot against her. When he came here, he came to attempt her destruction. She stands between him and this estate. Long ago, when I was a careless schoolboy, my poor friend, John Marchmont, told me that, if ever the day came upon which Mary's interests should be opposed to the interests of her cousin, that man would be a dire and bitter enemy; so much the more terrible because in all appearance her friend. The day came; and I, to whom the orphan girl had been left as a sacred legacy, was not by to defend her. But I have risen from a bed that many have thought a bed of death; and I come to this place with one indomitable resolution paramount in my breast,—the determination to find my wife, and to bring condign punishment upon the man who has done her wrong."

Captain Arundel spoke in a low voice; but his passion was all the more terrible because of the suppression of those common outward evidences by which anger ordinarily betrays itself. He relapsed into thoughtful silence.

Olivia made no answer to anything that he had said. She sat looking at him steadily, with an admiring awe in her face. How splendid he was —this young hero—even in his sickness and feebleness! How splendid, by reason of the grand courage, the chivalrous devotion, that shone out of his blue eyes!

The clock struck eleven while the cousins sat opposite to each other,—only divided, physically, by the width of the tapestried hearth-rug; but, oh, how many weary miles asunder in spirit!—and Edward Arundel rose, startled from his sorrowful reverie.

"If I were a strong man," he said, "I would see Paul Marchmont to-night. But I must wait till to-morrow morning. At what time does he come to his painting-room?"

"At eight o'clock, when the mornings are bright; but later when the weather is dull."

"At eight o'clock! I pray Heaven the sun may shine early to-morrow! I pray Heaven I may

not have to wait long before I find myself face to face with that man! Good-night, Olivia."

He took a candle from a table near the door, and lit it almost mechanically. He found Mr. Morrison waiting for him, very sleepy and despondent, in a large bedchamber in which Captain Arundel had never slept before,—a dreary apartment, decked out with the faded splendours of the past; a chamber in which the restless sleeper might expect to see a phantom lady in a ghostly sacque, cowering over the embers, and spreading her transparent hands above the red light.

"It isn't particular comfortable, after Dangerfield," the valet muttered in a melancholy voice; "and all I 'ope, Mr. Edward, is, that the sheets are not damp. I've been a stirrin' of the fire and puttin' on fresh coals for the last hour. There's a bed for me in the dressin' room, within call."

Captain Arundel scarcely heard what his servant said to him. He was standing at the door of the spacious chamber, looking out into a long low-roofed corridor, in which he had just encountered Barbara, Mrs. Marchmont's confidential attendant, —the wooden-faced, inscrutable-looking woman, who, according to Olivia, had watched and ministered to his wife.

"Was that the tenderest face that looked down upon my darling as she lay on her sick-bed?" he thought. "I had almost as soon have had a ghoul to watch by my poor dear's pillow."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PAINTING-ROOM BY THE RIVER.

EDWARD ARUNDEL lay awake through the best part of that November night, listening to the ceaseless dripping of the rain upon the terrace, and thinking of Paul Marchmont. It was of this man that he must demand an account of his wife. Nothing that Olivia had told him had in any way lessened this determination. The little slipper found by the water's edge; the placard flapping on the moss-grown pillar at the entrance to the park; the story of a possible suicide, or a more probable accident;—all these things were as nothing beside the young man's suspicion of Paul Marchmont. He had pooh-poohed John's dread of his kinsman as weak and unreasonable; and now, with the same unreason, he was ready to condemn this man, whom he had never seen, as a traitor and a plotter against his young wife.

He lay tossing from side to side all that night,

weak and feverish, with great drops of cold perspiration rolling down his pale face, sometimes falling into a fitful sleep, in whose distorted dreams Paul Marchmont was for ever present, now one man, now another. There was no sense of fitness in these dreams; for sometimes Edward Arundel and the artist were wrestling together with newly-sharpened daggers in their eager hands, each thirsting for the other's blood; and in the next moment they were friends, and had been friendly—as it seemed—for years.

The young man woke from one of these last dreams, with words of good-fellowship upon his lips, to find the morning light gleaming through the narrow openings in the damask window-curtains, and Mr. Morrison laying out his master's dressing apparatus upon the carved oak toilette-table.

Captain Arundel dressed himself as fast as he could, with the assistance of the valet, and then made his way down the broad staircase, with the help of his cane, upon which he had need to lean pretty heavily, for he was as weak as a child.

"You had better give me the brandy-flask, Morrison," he said. "I am going out before breakfast. You may as well come with me, by-

the-by; for I doubt if I could walk as far as I want to go, without the help of your arm."

In the hall Captain Arundel found one of the servants. The western door was open, and the man was standing on the threshold looking out at the morning. The rain had ceased; but the day did not yet promise to be very bright, for the sun gleamed like a ball of burnished copper through a pale November mist.

"Do you know if Mr. Paul Marchmont has gone down to the boat-house?" Edward asked.

"Yes, sir," the man answered; "I met him just now in the quadrangle. He'd been having a cup of coffee with my mistress."

Edward started. They were friends, then, Paul Marchmont and Olivia!—friends, but surely not allies! Whatever villany this man might be capable of committing, Olivia must at least be guiltless of any deliberate treachery?

Captain Arundel took his servant's arm and walked out into the quadrangle, and from the quadrangle to the low-lying woody swamp, where the stunted trees looked grim and weird-like in their leafless ugliness. Weak as the young man was, he walked rapidly across the sloppy ground, which had been almost flooded by the continual

rains. He was borne up by his fierce desire to be face to face with Paul Marchmont. The savage energy of his mind was stronger than any physical debility. He dismissed Mr. Morrison as soon as he was within sight of the boat-house, and went on alone, leaning on his stick, and pausing now and then to draw breath, angry with himself for his weakness.

The boat-house, and the pavilion above it, had been patched up by some country workmen. A handful of plaster here and there, a little new brickwork, and a mended window-frame bore witness of this. The ponderous old-fashioned wooden shutters had been repaired, and a good deal of the work which had been begun in John Marchmont's lifetime had now, in a certain rough manner, been completed. The place, which had hitherto appeared likely to fall into utter decay, had been rendered weather-tight and habitable; the black smoke creeping slowly upward from the ivy-covered chimney, gave evidence of occupation. Beyond this, a large wooden shed, with a wide window fronting the north, had been erected close against the boat-house. This rough shed Edward Arundel at once understood to be the painting-room which the artist had built for himself.

He paused a moment outside the door of this shed. A man's voice—a tenor voice, rather thin and metallic in quality—was singing a scrap of Rossini upon the other side of the frail woodwork.

Edward Arundel knocked with the handle of his stick upon the door. The voice left off singing, to say "Come in."

The soldier opened the door, crossed the threshold, and stood face to face with Paul Marchmont in the bare wooden shed. The painter had dressed himself for his work. His coat and waistcoat lay upon a chair near the door. He had put on a canvas jacket, and had drawn a loose pair of linen trousers over those which belonged to his usual costume. So far as this paint-besmeared coat and trousers went, nothing could have been more slovenly than Paul Marchmont's appearance; but some tincture of foppery exhibited itself in the black velvet smoking-cap, which contrasted with and set off the silvery whiteness of his hair, as well as in the delicate curve of his amber moustache. A moustache was not a very common adornment in the year 1848. It was rather an eccentricity affected by artists, and permitted as the wild caprice of irresponsible beings, not

amenable to the laws that govern rational and respectable people.

Edward Arundel sharply scrutinised the face and figure of the artist. He cast a rapid glance round the bare whitewashed walls of the shed, trying to read even in those bare walls some chance clue to the painter's character. But there was not much to be gleaned from the details of that almost empty chamber. A dismal, black-looking iron stove, with a crooked chimney, stood in one corner. A great easel occupied the centre of the room. A sheet of tin, nailed upon a wooden shutter, swung backwards and forwards against the northern window, blown to and fro by the damp wind that crept in through the crevices in the framework of the roughly-fashioned casement. A heap of canvases were piled against the walls, and here and there a half-finished picture—a lurid Turneresque landscape; a black stormy sky; or a rocky mountain-pass, dyed blood-red by the setting sun—was propped up against the whitewashed background. Scattered scraps of water-colour, crayon, old engravings, sketches torn and tumbled, bits of rockwork and foliage, lay littered about the floor; and on a paint-stained deal-table of the

roughest and plainest fashion were gathered the colour-tubes and palettes, the brushes and sponges and dirty cloths, the greasy and sticky tin-cans, which form the paraphernalia of an artist. Opposite the northern window was the moss-grown stone-staircase leading up to the pavilion over the boat-house. Mr. Marchmont had built his painting-room against the side of the pavilion, in such a manner as to shut in the staircase and doorway which formed the only entrance to it. His excuse for the awkwardness of this piece of architecture was the impossibility of otherwise getting the all-desirable northern light for the illumination of his rough studio.

This was the chamber in which Edward Arundel found the man from whom he came to demand an account of his wife's disappearance. The artist was evidently quite prepared to receive his visitor. He made no pretence of being taken off his guard, as a meaner pretender might have done. One of Paul Marchmont's theories was, that as it is only a fool who would use brass where he could as easily employ gold, so it is only a fool who tells a lie when he can conveniently tell the truth.

"Captain Arundel, I believe?" he said, pushing a chair forward for his visitor. "I am sorry to say I recognise you by your appearance of ill health. Mrs. Marchmont told me you wanted to see me. Does my meerschaum annoy you? I'll put it out if it does. No? Then, if you'll allow me, I'll go on smoking. Some people say tobacco-smoke gives a tone to one's pictures. If so, mine ought to be Rembrandts in depth of colour."

Edward Arundel dropped into the chair that had been offered to him. If he could by any possibility have rejected even this amount of hospitality from Paul Marchmont, he would have done so; but he was a great deal too weak to stand, and he knew that his interview with the artist must be a long one.

"Mr. Marchmont," he said, "if my cousin Olivia told you that you might expect to see me here to-day, she most likely told you a great deal more. Did she tell you that I looked to you to account to me for the disappearance of my wife?"

Paul Marchmont shrugged his shoulders, as who should say, "This young man is an invalid. I must not suffer myself to be aggravated by

his absurdity." Then taking his meerschaum from his lips, he set it down, and seated himself at a few paces from Edward Arundel on the lowest of the moss-grown steps leading up to the pavilion.

"My dear Captain Arundel," he said, very gravely, "your cousin did repeat to me a great deal of last night's conversation. She told me that you had spoken of me with a degree of violence, natural enough perhaps to a hot-tempered young soldier, but in no manner justified by our relations. When you call upon me to account for the disappearance of Mary Marchmont, you act about as rationally as if you declared me answerable for the pulmonary complaint that carried away her father. If, on the other hand, you call upon me to assist you in the endeavour to fathom the mystery of her disappearance, you will find me ready and willing to aid you to the very uttermost. It is to my interest as much as to yours that this mystery should be cleared up."

"And in the meantime you take possession of this estate?"

"No, Captain Arundel. The law would allow me to do so; but I decline to touch one farthing

of the revenue which this estate yields, or to commit one act of ownership, until the mystery of Mary Marchmont's disappearance, or of her death, is cleared up."

"The mystery of her death?" said Edward Arundel; "you believe, then, that she is dead?"

"I anticipate nothing; I think nothing," answered the artist; "I only wait. The mysteries of life are so many and so incomprehensible,—the stories, which are every day to be read by any man who takes the trouble to look through a newspaper, are so strange, and savour so much of the improbabilities of a novel-writer's first wild fiction,—that I am ready to believe everything and anything. Mary Marchmont struck me, from the first moment in which I saw her, as sadly deficient in mental power. Nothing she could do would astonish me. She may be hiding herself away from us, prompted only by some eccentric fancy of her own. She may have fallen into the power of designing people. She may have purposely placed her slipper by the waterside, in order to give the idea of an accident or a suicide; or she may have dropped it there by chance, and walked barefoot to the nearest railway-station. She acted unreasonably before

when she ran away from Marchmont Towers; she may have acted unreasonably again."

"You do not think, then, that she is dead?"

"I hesitate to form any opinion; I positively decline to express one."

Edward Arundel gnawed savagely at the ends of his moustache. This man's cool imperturbability, which had none of the studied smoothness of hypocrisy, but which seemed rather the plain candour of a thorough man of the world, who had no wish to pretend to any sentiment he did not feel, baffled and infuriated the passionate young soldier. Was it possible that this man, who met him with such cool self-assertion, who in no manner avoided any discussion of Mary Marchmont's disappearance,—was it possible that he could have had any treacherous and guilty part in that calamity? Olivia's manner looked like guilt; but Paul Marchmont's seemed the personification of innocence. Not angry innocence, indignant that its purity should have been suspected; but the matter-of-fact, commonplace innocence of a man of the world, who is a great deal too clever to play any hazardous and villanous game.

"You can perhaps answer me this question,

Mr. Marchmont," said Edward Arundel. "Why was my wife doubted when she told the story of her marriage?"

The artist smiled, and rising from his seat upon the stone step, took a pocket-book from one of the pockets of the coat that he had been wearing.

"I *can* answer that question," he said, selecting a paper from amongst others in the pocket-book. "This will answer it."

He handed Edward Arundel the paper, which was a letter folded lengthways, and indorsed, "From Mrs. Arundel, August 31st." Within this letter was another paper, indorsed, "Copy of letter to Mrs. Arundel, August 28th."

"You had better read the copy first," Mr. Marchmont said, as Edward looked doubtfully at the inner paper.

The copy was very brief, and ran thus:

"Marchmont Towers, August 28, 1848.

"MADAM,—I have been given to understand that your son, Captain Arundel, within a fortnight of his sad accident, contracted a secret marriage with a young lady, whose name I, for several reasons, prefer to withhold. If you can

oblige me by informing me whether there is any foundation for this statement, you will confer a very great favour upon

"Your obedient servant,

"PAUL MARCHMONT."

The answer to this letter, in the hand of Edward Arundel's mother, was equally brief:

"Dangerfield Park, August 31, 1848.

"SIR,—In reply to your inquiry, I beg to state that there can be no foundation whatever for the report to which you allude. My son is too honourable to contract a secret marriage; and although his present unhappy state renders it impossible for me to receive the assurance from his own lips, my confidence in his high principles justifies me in contradicting any such report as that which forms the subject of your letter.

"I am, sir,

"Yours obediently,

"LETITIA ARUNDEL."

The soldier stood, mute and confounded, with his mother's letter in his hand. It seemed as if every creature had been against the helpless girl whom he had made his wife. Every hand had

been lifted to drive her from the house that was her own; to drive her out upon the world, of which she was ignorant, a wanderer and an outcast; perhaps to drive her to a cruel death.

"You can scarcely wonder if the receipt of that letter confirmed me in my previous belief that Mary Marchmont's story of a marriage arose out of the weakness of a brain, never too strong, and at that time very much enfeebled by the effect of a fever."

Edward Arundel was silent. He crushed his mother's letter in his hand. Even his mother—even his mother—that tender and compassionate woman, whose protection he had so freely promised, ten years before, in the lobby of Drury Lane, to John Marchmont's motherless child,—even she, by some hideous fatality, had helped to bring grief and shame upon the lonely girl. All this story of his young wife's disappearance seemed enveloped in a wretched obscurity, through whose thick darkness he could not penetrate. He felt himself encompassed by a web of mystery, athwart which it was impossible to cut his way to the truth. He asked question after question, and received answers which seemed freely given; but the story remained as dark as ever. What did it,

all mean? What was the clue to the mystery? Was this man, Paul Marchmont,—busy amongst his unfinished pictures, and bearing in his every action, in his every word, the stamp of an easy-going, free-spoken soldier of fortune,—likely to have been guilty of any dark and subtle villany against the missing girl? He had disbelieved in the marriage; but he had had some reason for his doubt of a fact that could not very well be welcome to him.

The young man rose from his chair, and stood irresolute, brooding over these things.

"Come, Captain Arundel," cried Paul Marchmont, heartily, "believe me, though I have not much superfluous sentimentality left in my composition after a pretty long encounter with the world, still I can truly sympathise with your regret for this poor silly child. I hope, for your sake, that she still lives, and is foolishly hiding herself from us all. Perhaps, now you are able to act in the business, there may be a better chance of finding her. I am old enough to be your father, and am ready to give you the help of any knowledge of the world which I may have gathered in the experience of a lifetime. Will you accept my help?"

Edward Arundel paused for a moment, with his head still bent, and his eyes fixed upon the ground. Then suddenly lifting his head, he looked full in the artist's face as he answered him.

"No!" he cried. "Your offer may be made in all good faith, and if so, I thank you for it; but no one loves this missing girl as I love her; no one has so good a right as I have to protect and shelter her. I will look for my wife, alone, unaided; except by such help as I pray that God may give me."

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE DARK.

EDWARD ARUNDEL walked slowly back to the Towers, shaken in body, perplexed in mind, baffled, disappointed, and most miserable; the young husband, whose married life had been shut within the compass of a brief honeymoon, went back to that dark and gloomy mansion within whose encircling walls Mary had pined and despaired.

"Why did she stop here?" he thought; "why didn't she come to me? I thought her first impulse would have brought her to me. I thought my poor childish love would have set out on foot to seek her husband, if need were."

He groped his way feebly and wearily amidst the leafless wood, and through the rotting vegetation decaying in oozy slime beneath the black shelter of the naked trees. He groped his way towards the dismal eastern front of the great

stone dwelling-house, his face always turned towards the blank windows, that stared down at him from the discoloured walls.

"Oh, if they could speak!" he exclaimed, almost beside himself in his perplexity and desperation; "if they could speak! If those cruel walls could find a voice, and tell me what my darling suffered within their shadow! If they could tell me why she despaired, and ran away to hide herself from her husband and protector! *If* they could speak!"

He ground his teeth in a passion of sorrowful rage.

"I should gain as much by questioning yonder stone wall as by talking to my cousin, Olivia Marchmont," he thought, presently. "Why is that woman so venomous a creature in her hatred of my innocent wife? Why is it that, whether I threaten, or whether I appeal, I can gain nothing from her—nothing? She baffles me as completely by her measured answers, which seem to reply to my questions, and which yet tell me nothing, as if she were a brazen image set up by the dark ignorance of a heathen people, and dumb in the absence of an impostor-priest. She baffles me, question her how I will. And Paul Marchmont, again,—what have I learned from him? Am I a

fool, that people can prevaricate and lie to me like this? Has my brain no sense, and my arm no strength, that I cannot wring the truth from the false throats of these wretches?"

The young man gnashed his teeth again in the violence of his rage.

Yes, it was like a dream; it was like nothing but a dream. In dreams he had often felt this terrible sense of impotence wrestling with a mad desire to achieve something or other. But never before in his waking hours had the young soldier experienced such a sensation.

He stopped, irresolute, almost bewildered, looking back at the boat-house, a black spot far away down by the sedgy brink of the slow river, and then again turning his face towards the monotonous lines of windows in the eastern frontage of Marchmont Towers.

"I let that man play with me to-day," he thought; "but our reckoning is to come. We have not done with each other yet."

He walked on towards the low archway leading into the quadrangle.

The room which had been John Marchmont's study, and which his widow had been wont to occupy since his death, looked into this quad-

rangle. Edward Arundel saw his cousin's dark head bending over a book, or a desk perhaps, behind the window.

"Let her beware of me, if she has done any wrong to my wife!" he thought. "To which of these people am I to look for an account of my poor lost girl? To which of these two am I to look! Heaven guide me to find the guilty one; and Heaven have mercy upon that wretched creature when the hour of reckoning comes; for I will have none."

Olivia Marchmont, looking through the window, saw her kinsman's face while this thought was in his mind. The expression which she saw there was so terrible, so merciless, so sublime in its grand and vengeful beauty, that her own face blanched even to a paler hue than that which had lately become habitual to it.

"Am I afraid of him?" she thought. as she pressed her forehead against the cold glass, and by a physical effort restrained the convulsive trembling that had suddenly shaken her frame. "Am I afraid of him? No; what injury can he inflict upon me worse than that which he has done me from the very first? If he could drag me to a scaffold, and deliver me with his own

hands into the grasp of the hangman, he would do me no deeper wrong than he has done me from the hour of my earliest remembrance of him. He could inflict no new pangs, no sharper tortures, than I have been accustomed to suffer at his hands. He does not love me. He has never loved me. He never will love me. *That* is my wrong; and it is for that I take my revenge!"

She lifted her head, which had rested in a sullen attitude against the glass, and looked at the soldier's figure slowly advancing towards the western side of the house.

Then, with a smile,—the same horrible smile which Edward Arundel had seen light up her face on the previous night,—she muttered between her set teeth:—

"Shall I be sorry because this vengeance has fallen across my pathway? Shall I repent, and try to undo what I have done? Shall I thrust myself between others and Mr. Edward Arundel? Shall *I* make myself the ally and champion of this gallant soldier, who seldom speaks to me except to insult and upbraid me? Shall *I* take justice into my hands, and interfere for my kinsman's benefit? No; he has chosen to threaten me; he has chosen to believe vile

things of me. From the first his indifference has been next kin to insolence. Let him take care of himself."

Edward Arundel took no heed of the grey eyes that watched him with such a vengeful light in their fixed gaze. He was still thinking of his missing wife, still feeling, to a degree that was intolerably painful, that miserable dream-like sense of helplessness and prostration.

"What am I to do?" he thought. "Shall I be for ever going backwards and forwards between my Cousin Olivia and Paul Marchmont; for ever questioning them, first one and then the other, and never getting any nearer to the truth?"

He asked himself this question, because the extreme anguish, the intense anxiety, which he had endured, seemed to have magnified the smallest events, and to have multiplied a hundred-fold the lapse of time. It seemed as if he had already spent half a lifetime in his search after John Marchmont's lost daughter.

"O my friend, my friend!" he thought, as some faint link of association, some memory thrust upon him by the aspect of the place in which he was, brought back the simple-minded tutor who had taught him mathematics eighteen

years before,—"my poor friend, if this girl had not been my love and my wife, surely the memory of your trust in me would be enough to make me a desperate and merciless avenger of her wrongs.

He went into the hall, and from the hall to the tenantless western drawing-room,—a dreary chamber, with its grim and faded splendour, its stiff, old-fashioned furniture; a chamber which, unadorned by the presence of youth and innocence, had the aspect of belonging to a day that was gone, and people that were dead. So might have looked one of those sealed-up chambers in the buried cities of Italy, when the doors were opened, and eager living eyes first looked in upon the habitations of the dead.

Edward Arundel walked up and down the empty drawing-room. There were the ivory chessmen that he had brought from India, under a glass shade on an inlaid table in a window. How often he and Mary had played together in that very window; and how she had always lost her pawns, and left bishops and knights undefended, while trying to execute impossible manœuvres with her queen! The young man paced slowly backwards and forwards across the

old-fashioned bordered carpet, trying to think what he should do. He must form some plan of action in his own mind, he thought. There was foul work somewhere, he most implicitly believed; and it was for him to discover the motive of the treachery, and the person of the traitor.

Paul Marchmont! Paul Marchmont!

His mind always travelled back to this point. Paul Marchmont was Mary's natural enemy. Paul Marchmont was therefore surely the man to be suspected, the man to be found out and defeated.

And yet, if there was any truth in appearances, it was Olivia who was most inimical to the missing girl; it was Olivia whom Mary had feared; it was Olivia who had driven John Marchmont's orphan-child from her home once, and who might, by the same power to tyrannise and torture a weak and yielding nature, have so banished her again.

Or these two, Paul and Olivia, might both hate the defenceless girl, and might have between them plotted a wrong against her.

"Who will tell me the truth about my lost darling?" cried Edward Arundel. "Who will help me to look for my missing love?"

His lost darling; his missing love. It was thus that the young man spoke of his wife. That dark thought which had been suggested to him by the words of Olivia, by the mute evidence of the little bronze slipper picked up near the river-brink, had never taken root, or held even a temporary place in his breast. He would not—nay, more, he could not—think that his wife was dead. In all his confused and miserable dreams that dreary November night, no dream had ever shown him *that*. No image of death had mingled itself with the distorted shadows that had tormented his sleep. No still white face had looked up at him through a veil of murky waters. No moaning sob of a rushing stream had mixed its dismal sound with the many voices of his slumbers. No; he feared all manner of unknown sorrows; he looked vaguely forward to a sea of difficulty, to be waded across in blindness and bewilderment before he could clasp his rescued wife in his arms; but he never thought that she was dead.

Presently the idea came to him that it was outside Marchmont Towers,—away, beyond the walls of this grim, enchanted castle, where evil spirits seemed to hold possession,—that he

should seek for the clue to his wife's hiding-place.

"There is Hester, that girl who was fond of Mary," he thought; "she may be able to tell me something, perhaps. I will go to her."

He went out into the hall to look for his servant, the faithful Morrison, who had been eating a very substantial breakfast with the domestics of the Towers—"the sauce to meat" being a prolonged discussion of the facts connected with Mary Marchmont's disappearance and her relations with Edward Arundel—and who came, radiant and greasy from the enjoyment of hot buttered cakes and Lincolnshire bacon, at the sound of his master's voice.

"I want you to get me some vehicle, and a lad who will drive me a few miles, Morrison," the young soldier said; "or you can drive me yourself, perhaps?"

"Certainly, Master Edward; I have driven your pa often, when we was travellin' together. I'll go and see if there's a phee-aton or a shay that will suit you, sir; something that goes easy on its springs."

"Get anything," muttered Captain Arundel, "so long as you can get it without loss of time."

All fuss and anxiety upon the subject of his health worried the young man. He felt his head dizzied with weakness and excitement; his arm—that muscular right arm, which had done him good service two years before in an encounter with a tigress—was weaker than the jewel-bound wrist of a woman. But he chafed against anything like consideration of his weakness; he rebelled against anything that seemed likely to hinder him in that one object upon which all the powers of his mind were bent.

Mr. Morrison went away with some show of briskness, but dropped into a very leisurely pace as soon as he was fairly out of his master's sight. He went straight to the stables, where he had a pleasant gossip with the grooms and hangers-on, and amused himself further by inspecting every bit of horseflesh in the Marchmont stables, prior to selecting a quiet grey cob which he felt himself capable of driving, and an old-fashioned gig with a yellow body and black and yellow wheels, bearing a strong resemblance to a monstrous wooden wasp.

While the faithful attendant to whom Mrs. Arundel had delegated the care of her son was thus employed, the soldier stood in the stone hall,

looking out at the dreary wintry landscape, and pining to hurry away across the dismal swamps to the village in which he hoped to hear tidings of her he sought. He was lounging in a deep oaken window-seat, looking hopelessly at that barren prospect, that monotonous expanse of flat morass and leaden sky, when he heard a footstep behind him; and turning round saw Olivia's confidential servant, Barbara Simmons, the woman who had watched by his wife's sick-bed,—the woman whom he had compared to a ghoule.

She was walking slowly across the hall towards Olivia's room, whither a bell had just summoned her. Mrs. Marchmont had lately grown fretful and capricious, and did not care to be waited upon by any one except this woman, who had known her from her childhood, and was no stranger to her darkest moods.

Edward Arundel had determined to appeal to every living creature who was likely to know anything of his wife's disappearance, and he snatched the first opportunity of questioning this woman.

"Stop, Mrs. Simmons," he said, moving away from the window; "I want to speak to you; I want to talk to you about my wife."

The woman turned to him with a blank face, whose expressionless stare might mean either genuine surprise or an obstinate determination not to understand anything that might be said to her.

"Your wife, Captain Arundel!" she said, in cold measured tones, but with an accent of astonishment.

"Yes; my wife. Mary Marchmont, my lawfully-wedded wife. Look here, woman," cried Edward Arundel; "if you cannot accept the word of a soldier, and an honourable man, you can perhaps believe the evidence of your eyes."

He took a morocco memorandum-book from his breast-pocket. It was full of letters, cards, bank-notes, and miscellaneous scraps of paper carelessly stuffed into it, and amongst them Captain Arundel found the certificate of his marriage, which he had put away at random upon his wedding morning, and which had lain unheeded in his pocket-book ever since.

"Look here," he cried, spreading the document before the waiting-woman's eyes, and pointing, with a shaking hand, to the lines. "You believe that, I suppose?"

"O yes, sir," Barbara Simmons answered, after

deliberately reading the certificate. "I have no reason to disbelieve it; no wish to disbelieve it."

"No; I suppose not," muttered Edward Arundel, "unless you too are leagued with Paul Marchmont."

The woman did not flinch at this hinted accusation, but answered the young man in that slow and emotionless manner which no change of circumstance seemed to have power to alter.

"I am leagued with no one, sir," she said, coldly. "I serve no one except my mistress, Miss Olivia—I mean Mrs. Marchmont."

The study-bell rang for the second time while she was speaking.

"I must go to my mistress now, sir," she said. "You heard her ringing for me."

"Go, then, and let me see you as you come back. I tell you I must and will speak to you. Everybody in this house tries to avoid me. It seems as if I was not to get a straight answer from any one of you. But I *will* know all that is to be known about my lost wife. Do you hear, woman? I will know!"

"I will come back to you directly, sir," Barbara Simmons answered quietly.

The leaden calmness of this woman's manner

irritated Edward Arundel beyond all power of expression. Before his cousin Olivia's gloomy coldness he had been flung back upon himself as before an iceberg; but every now and then some sudden glow of fiery emotion had shot up amid that frigid mass, lurid and blazing, and the iceberg had been transformed into an angry and passionate woman, who might, in that moment of fierce emotion, betray the dark secrets of her soul. But *this* woman's manner presented a passive barrier, athwart whch the young soldier was as powerless to penetrate as he would have been to walk through a block of solid stone.

Olivia was like some black and stony castle, whose barred windows bade defiance to the besieger, but behind whose narrow casements transient flashes of light gleamed fitfully upon the watchers without, hinting at the mysteries that were hidden within the citadel.

Barbara Simmons resembled a blank stone wall, grimly confronting the eager traveller, and giving no indication whatever of the unknown country on the other side.

She came back almost immediately, after being only a few moments in Olivia's room,—certainly not long enough to consult with her mistress as to

what she was to say or to leave unsaid,—and presented herself before Captain Arundel.

"If you have any questions to ask, sir, about Miss Marchmont—about your wife—I shall be happy to answer them," she said.

"I have a hundred questions to ask," exclaimed the young man; "but first answer me this one plainly and truthfully—Where do you think my wife has gone? What do you think has become of her?"

The woman was silent for a few moments, and then answered very gravely,—

"I would rather not say what I think, sir."

"Why not?"

"Because I might say that which would make you unhappy."

"Can anything be more miserable to me than the prevarication which I meet with on every side?" cried Edward Arundel. "If you or any one else will be straightforward with me—remembering that I come to this place like a man who has risen from the grave, depending wholly on the word of others for the knowledge of that which is more vital to me than anything upon this earth—that person will be the best friend I have found since I rose from my sick-bed to come hither.

You can have had no motive—if you are not in Paul Marchmont's pay—for being cruel to my poor girl. Tell me the truth, then; speak, and speak fearlessly."

"I have no reason to fear, sir," answered Barbara Simmons, lifting her faded eyes to the young man's eager face, with a gaze that seemed to say, "I have done no wrong, and I do not shrink from justifying myself." "I have no reason to fear, sir; I was piously brought up, and have done my best always to do my duty in the state of life in which Providence has been pleased to place me. I have not had a particularly happy life, sir; for thirty years ago I lost all that made me happy, in them that loved me, and had a claim to love me. I have attached myself to my mistress; but it isn't for me to expect a lady like her would stoop to make me more to her or nearer to her than I have a right to be as a servant."

There was no accent of hypocrisy or cant in any one of these deliberately-spoken words. It seemed as if in this speech the woman had told the history of her life; a brief, unvarnished history of a barren life, out of which all love and sunlight had been early swept away, leaving behind a desolate blank,

that was not destined to be filled up by any affection from the young mistress so long and patiently served.

"I am faithful to my mistress, sir," Barbara Simmons added, presently; "and I try my best to do my duty to her. I owe no duty to any one else."

"You owe a duty to humanity," answered Edward Arundel. "Woman, do you think duty is a thing to be measured by line and rule? Christ came to save the lost sheep of the children of Israel; but was He less pitiful to the Canaanitish woman when she carried her sorrows to His feet? You and your mistress have made hard precepts for yourselves, and have tried to live by them. You try to circumscribe the area of your Christian charity, and to do good within given limits. The traveller who fell among thieves would have died of his wounds, for any help he might have had from you, if he had lain beyond your radius. Have you yet to learn that Christianity is cosmopolitan, illimitable, inexhaustible, subject to no laws of time or space? The duty you owe to your mistress is a duty that she buys and pays for—a matter of sordid barter, to be settled when you take your wages; the duty you

owe to every miserable creature in your pathway is a sacred debt, to be accounted for to God."

As the young soldier spoke thus, carried away by his passionate agitation, suddenly eloquent by reason of the intensity of his feeling, a change came over Barbara's face. There was no very palpable evidence of emotion in that stolid countenance; but across the wooden blankness of the woman's face flitted a transient shadow, which was like the shadow of fear.

"I tried to do my duty to Miss Marchmont as well as to my mistress," she said. "I waited on her faithfully while she was ill. I sat up with her six nights running; I didn't take my clothes off for a week. There are folks in the house who can tell you as much."

"God knows I am grateful to you, and will reward you for any pity you may have shown my poor darling," the young man answered, in a more subdued tone; "only, if you pity me, and wish to help me, speak out, and speak plainly. What do you think has become of my lost girl?"

"I cannot tell you, sir. As God looks down upon me and judges me, I declare to you that I know no more than you know. But I think——"

"You think what?"

"That you will never see Miss Marchmont again."

Edward Arundel started as violently as if, of all sentences, this was the last he had expected to hear pronounced. His sanguine temperament, fresh in its vigorous and untainted youth, could not grasp the thought of despair. He could be mad with passionate anger against the obstacles that separated him from his wife; but he could not believe those obstacles to be insurmountable. He could not doubt the power of his own devotion and courage to bring him back his lost love.

"Never—see her—again!"

He repeated these words as if they had belonged to a strange language, and he were trying to make out their meaning.

"You think," he gasped hoarsely, after a long pause,—"you think—that—she is—dead?"

"I think that she went out of this house in a desperate state of mind. She was seen—not by me, for I should have thought it my duty to stop her if I had seen her so—she was seen by one of the servants crying and sobbing awfully as she went away upon that last afternoon."

"And she was never seen again?"

"Never by me."

"And—you—you think she went out of this house with the intention of—of—destroying herself?"

The words died away in a hoarse whisper, and it was by the motion of his white lips that Barbara Simmons perceived what the young man meant.

"I do, sir."

"Have you any—particular reason for thinking so?"

"No reason beyond what I have told you, sir."

Edward Arundel bent his head, and walked away to hide his blanched face. He tried instinctively to conceal this mental suffering, as he had sometimes hidden physical torture in an Indian hospital, prompted by the involuntary impulse of a brave man. But though the woman's words had come upon him like a thunderbolt, he had no belief in the opinion they expressed. No; his young spirit wrestled against and rejected the awful conclusion. Other people might think what they chose; but he knew better than they. His wife was *not* dead. His life had been so smooth, so happy, so prosperous, so unclouded and successful, that it was scarcely strange he should be sceptical of

calamity,—that his mind should be incapable of grasping the idea of a catastrophe so terrible as Mary's suicide.

"She was intrusted to me by her father," he thought. "She gave her faith to me before God's altar. She *cannot* have perished body and soul; she *cannot* have gone down to destruction for want of my arm outstretched to save her. God is too good to permit such misery."

The young soldier's piety was of the simplest and most unquestioning order, and involved an implicit belief that a right cause must always be ultimately victorious. With the same blind faith in which he had often muttered a hurried prayer before plunging in amidst the mad havoc of an Indian battle-field, confident that the justice of Heaven would never permit heathenish Affghans to triumph over Christian British gentlemen, he now believed that, in the darkest hour of Mary Marchmont's life, God's arm had held her back from the dread horror—the unatonable offence—of self-destruction.

"I thank you for having spoken frankly to me," he said to Barbara Simmons; "I believe that you have spoken in good faith. But I do not think my darling is for ever lost to me. I anticipate

trouble and anxiety, disappointment, defeat for a time,—for a long time, perhaps; but I *know* that I shall find her in the end. The business of my life henceforth is to look for her."

Barbara's dull eyes held earnest watch upon the young man's countenance as he spoke. Anxiety and even fear were in that gaze, palpable to those who knew how to read the faint indications of the woman's stolid face.

CHAPTER X.

THE PARAGRAPH IN THE NEWSPAPER.

MR. MORRISON brought the gig and pony to the western porch while Captain Arundel was talking to his cousin's servant, and presently the invalid was being driven across the flat between the Towers and the high-road to Kemberling.

Mary's old favourite, Farmer Pollard's daughter, came out of a low rustic shop as the gig drew up before her husband's door. This good-natured, tender-hearted Hester, advanced to matronly dignity under the name of Mrs. Jobson, carried a baby in her arms, and wore a white dimity hood, that made a penthouse over her simple rosy face. But at the sight of Captain Arundel nearly all the rosy colour disappeared from the country-woman's plump cheeks, and she stared aghast at the unlooked-for visitor, almost ready to believe that, if anything so substantial as a pony and gig could belong to the spiritual world, it was the

phantom only of the soldier that she looked upon.

"O sir!" she said; "O Captain Arundel, is it really you?"

Edward alighted before Hester could recover from the surprise occasioned by his appearance.

"Yes, Mrs. Jobson," he said. "May I come into your house? I wish to speak to you."

Hester curtseyed, and stood aside to allow her visitor to pass her. Her manner was coldly respectful, and she looked at the young officer with a grave, reproachful face, which was strange to him. She ushered her guest into a parlour at the back of the shop; a prim apartment, splendid with varnished mahogany, shell-work boxes—bought during Hester's honeymoon-trip to a Lincolnshire watering-place—and voluminous achievements in the way of crochet-work; a gorgeous and Sabbath-day chamber, looking across a stand of geraniums into a garden that was orderly and trimly kept even in this dull November weather.

Mrs. Jobson drew forward an uneasy easy-chair, covered with horsehair, and veiled by a crochet-work representation of a peacock embowered among roses. She offered this luxurious seat to Captain Arundel, who, in his weakness,

was well content to sink down upon the slippery cushions.

"I have come here to ask you to help me in my search for my wife, Hester," Edward Arundel said, in a scarcely audible voice.

It is not given to the bravest mind to be utterly independent and defiant of the body; and the soldier was beginning to feel that he had very nearly run the length of his tether, and must soon submit himself to be prostrated by sheer physical weakness.

"Your wife!" cried Hester eagerly. "O sir, is that true?"

"Is what true?"

"That poor Miss Mary was your lawful wedded wife?"

"She was," replied Edward Arundel sternly, "my true and lawful wife. What else should she have been, Mrs. Jobson?"

The farmer's daughter burst into tears.

"O sir," she said, sobbing violently as she spoke,—"O sir, the things that was said against that poor dear in this place and all about the Towers! The things that was said! It makes my heart bleed to think of them; it makes my heart ready to break when I think what my

poor sweet young lady must have suffered. And it set me against you, sir; and I thought you was a bad and cruel-hearted man!"

"What did they say?" cried Edward. "What did they dare to say against her or against me?"

"They said that you had enticed her away from her home, sir, and that—that—there had been no marriage; and that you had deluded that poor innocent dear to run away with you; and that you'd deserted her afterwards, and the railway accident had come upon you as a punishment like; and that Mrs. Marchmont had found poor Miss Mary all alone at a country inn, and had brought her back to the Towers."

"But what if people did say this?" exclaimed Captain Arundel. "You could have contradicted their foul slanders; you could have spoken in defence of my poor helpless girl."

"Me, sir!"

"Yes. You must have heard the truth from my wife's own lips."

Hester Jobson burst into a new flood of tears as Edward Arundel said this.

"O no, sir," she sobbed; "that was the most cruel thing of all. I never could get to see Miss Mary; they wouldn't let me see her."

"Who wouldn't let you?"

"Mrs. Marchmont and Mr. Paul Marchmont. I was laid up, sir, when the report first spread about that Miss Mary had come home. Things was kept very secret, and it was said that Mrs. Marchmont was dreadfully cut up by the disgrace that had come upon her stepdaughter. My baby was born about that time, sir; but as soon as ever I could get about, I went up to the Towers, in the hope of seeing my poor dear miss. But Mrs. Simmons, Mrs. Marchmont's own maid, told me that Miss Mary was ill, very ill, and that no one was allowed to see her except those that waited upon her and that she was used to. And I begged and prayed that I might be allowed to see her, sir, with the tears in my eyes; for my heart bled for her, poor darling dear, when I thought of the cruel things that was said against her, and thought that, with all her riches and her learning, folks could dare to talk of her as they wouldn't dare talk of a poor man's wife like me. And I went again and again, sir; but it was no good; and, the last time I went, Mrs. Marchmont came out into the hall to me, and told me that I was intrusive and impertinent, and that it was me, and such as me, as had set all manner of scandal

afloat about her stepdaughter. But I went again, sir, even after that; and I saw Mr. Paul Marchmont, and he was very kind to me, and frank and free-spoken,—almost like you, sir; and he told me that Mrs. Marchmont was rather stern and unforgiving towards the poor young lady,—he spoke very kind and pitiful of poor Miss Mary,—and that he would stand my friend, and he'd contrive that I should see my poor dear as soon as ever she picked up her spirits a bit, and was more fit to see me; and I was to come again in a week's time, he said."

"Well; and when you went——?"

"When I went, sir," sobbed the carpenter's wife, "it was the 18th of October, and Miss Mary had run away upon the day before, and every body at the Towers was being sent right and left to look for her. I saw Mrs. Marchmont for a minute that afternoon; and she was as white as a sheet, and all of a tremble from head to foot, and she walked about the place as if she was out of her mind like."

"Guilt," thought the young soldier; "guilt of some sort. God only knows what that guilt has been!"

He covered his face with his hands, and waited

to hear what more Hester Jobson had to tell him. There was no need of questioning here—no reservation or prevarication. With almost as tender regret as he himself could have felt, the carpenter's wife told him all that she knew of the sad story of Mary's disappearance.

"Nobody took much notice of me, sir, in the confusion of the place," Mrs. Jobson continued; "and there is a parlour-maid at the Towers called Susan Rose, that had been a schoolfellow with me ten years before, and I got her to tell me all about it. And she said that poor dear Miss Mary had been weak and ailing ever since she had recovered from the brain-fever, and that she had shut herself up in her room, and had seen no one except Mrs. Marchmont, and Mr. Paul, and Barbara Simmons; but on the 17th Mrs. Marchmont sent for her, asking her to come to the study. And the poor young lady went; and then Susan Rose thinks that there was high words between Mrs. Marchmont and her stepdaughter; for as Susan was crossing the hall poor Miss came out of the study, and her face was all smothered in tears, and she cried out, as she came into the hall, 'I can't bear it any longer. My life is too miserable; my fate is too wretched!' And then she

ran upstairs, and Susan Rose followed up to her room and listened outside the door; and she heard the poor dear sobbing and crying out again and again, 'O papa, papa! If you knew what I suffer! O papa, papa, papa!'—so pitiful, that if Susan Rose had dared she would have gone in to try and comfort her; but Miss Mary had always been very reserved to all the servants, and Susan didn't dare intrude upon her. It was late that evening when my poor young lady was missed, and the servants sent out to look for her."

"And you, Hester,—you knew my wife better than any of these people,—where do you think she went?"

Hester Jobson looked piteously at the questioner.

"O sir!" she cried; "O Captain Arundel, don't ask me; pray, pray don't ask me."

"You think like these other people,—you think that she went away to destroy herself?"

"O sir, what can I think, what can I think except that? She was last seen down by the water-side, and one of her shoes was picked up amongst the rushes; and for all there's been such a search made after her, and a reward offered, and advertisements in the papers, and everything done that mortal could do to find her, there's been no

news of her, sir,—not a trace to tell of her being living; not a creature to come forward and speak to her being seen by them after that day. What can I think, sir, what can I think, except—"

"Except that she threw herself into the river behind Marchmont Towers."

"I've tried to think different, sir; I've tried to hope I should see that poor sweet lamb again; but I can't, I can't. I've worn mourning for these three last Sundays, sir; for I seemed to feel as if it was a sin and a disrespectfulness towards her to wear colours, and sit in the church where I have seen her so often, looking so meek and beautiful, Sunday after Sunday."

Edward Arundel bowed his head upon his hands and wept silently. This woman's belief in Mary's death afflicted him more than he dared confess to himself. He had defied Olivia and Paul Marchmont, as enemies, who tried to force a false conviction upon him; but he could neither doubt nor defy this honest, warm-hearted creature, who wept aloud over the memory of his wife's sorrows. He could not doubt her sincerity; but he still refused to accept the belief which on every side was pressed upon him. He still refused to think that his wife was dead.

"The river was dragged for more than a week," he said, presently, "and my wife's body was never found."

Hester Jobson shook her head mournfully.

"That's a poor sign, sir," she answered; "the river's full of holes, I've heard say. My husband had a fellow-'prentice who drowned himself in that river seven year ago, and *his* body was never found."

Edward Arundel rose and walked towards the door.

"I do not believe that my wife is dead," he cried. He held out his hand to the carpenter's wife. "God bless you!" he said. "I thank you from my heart for your tender feeling towards my lost girl."

He went out to the gig, in which Mr. Morrison waited for him, rather tired of his morning's work.

"There is an inn a little way farther along the street, Morrison," Captain Arundel said. "I shall stop there."

The man stared at his master.

"And not go back to Marchmont Towers, Mr. Edward?"

"No."

Edward Arundel had held Nature in abeyance for more than four-and-twenty hours, and this outraged Nature now took her revenge by flinging the young man prostrate, and powerless upon his bed at the simple Kemberling hostelry, and holding him prisoner there for three dreary days; three miserable days, with long, dark interminable evenings, during which the invalid had no better employment than to lie brooding over his sorrows, while Mr. Morrison read the "Times" newspaper in a monotonous and droning voice, for his sick master's entertainment.

How that helpless and prostrate prisoner, bound hand and foot in the stern grasp of retaliative Nature, loathed the leading-articles, the foreign correspondence, in the leviathan journal! How he sickened at the fiery English of Printing-House Square, as expounded by Mr. Morrison! The sound of the valet's voice was like the unbroken flow of a dull river. The great names that surged up every now and then upon that sluggish tide of oratory made no impression upon the sick man's mind. What was it to him if the glory of England were in danger, the freedom of a mighty people wavering in the balance? What was it to him if famine-stricken Ireland were perishing,

and the far-away Indian possessions menaced by contumacious and treacherous Sikhs? What was it to him if the heavens were shrivelled like a blazing scroll, and the earth reeling on its shaken foundations? What had he to do with any catastrophe except that which had fallen upon his innocent young wife?

"O my broken trust!" he muttered sometimes, to the alarm of the confidential servant; "O my broken trust!"

But during the three days in which Captain Arundel lay in the best chamber at the Black Bull—the chief inn of Kemberling, and a very splendid place of public entertainment long ago, when all the northward-bound coaches had passed through that quiet Lincolnshire village—he was not without a medical attendant to give him some feeble help in the way of drugs and doctor's stuff, in the battle which he was fighting with offended Nature. I don't know but that the help, however well intended, may have gone rather to strengthen the hand of the enemy; for in those days—the year '48 is very long ago when we take the measure of time by science—country practitioners were apt to place themselves upon the side of the disease rather than of the patient, and to assist

grim Death in his siege, by lending the professional aid of purgatives and phlebotomy.

On this principle Mr. George Weston, the surgeon of Kemberling, and the submissive and well-tutored husband of Paul Marchmont's sister, would fain have set to work with the prostrate soldier, on the plea that the patient's skin was hot and dry, and his white lips parched with fever. But Captain Arundel protested vehemently against any such treatment.

"You shall not take an ounce of blood out of my veins," he said, "or give me one drop of medicine that will weaken me. What I want is strength; strength to get up and leave this intolerable room, and go about the business that I have to do. As to fever," he added scornfully, "as long as I have to lie here and am hindered from going about the business of my life, every drop of my blood will boil with a fever that all the drugs in Apothecaries' Hall would have no power to subdue. Give me something to strengthen me. Patch me up somehow or other, Mr. Weston, if you can. But I warn you that, if you keep me long here, I shall leave this place either a corpse or a madman."

The surgeon, drinking tea with his wife and brother-in-law half an hour afterwards, related

the conversation that had taken place between himself and his patient, breaking up his narrative with a great many "I said's" and "said he's," and with a good deal of rambling commentary upon the text.

Lavinia Weston looked at her brother while the surgeon told his story.

"He is very desperate about his wife, then, this dashing young captain?" Mr. Marchmont said, presently.

"Awful," answered the surgeon; "regular awful. I never saw anything like it. Really it was enough to cut a man up to hear him go on so. He asked me all sorts of questions about the time when she was ill and I attended upon her, and what did she say to me, and did she seem very unhappy, and all that sort of thing. Upon my word, you know, Mr. Paul,—of course I am very glad to think of your coming into the fortune, and I'm very much obliged to you for the kind promises you've made to me and Lavinia; but I almost felt as if I could have wished the poor young lady hadn't drowned herself."

Mrs. Weston shrugged her shoulders, and looked at her brother.

"*Imbecile!*" she muttered.

She was accustomed to talk to her brother very freely in rather school-girl French before her husband, to whom that language was as the most recondite of tongues, and who heartily admired her for superior knowledge.

He sat staring at her now, and eating bread-and-butter with a simple relish, which in itself was enough to mark him out as a man to be trampled upon.

On the fourth day after his interview with Hester, Edward Arundel was strong enough to leave his chamber at the Black Bull.

"I shall go to London by to-night's mail, Morrison," he said to his servant; "but before I leave Lincolnshire, I must pay another visit to Marchmont Towers. You can stop here, and pack my portmanteau while I go."

"A rumbling old fly—looked upon as a splendid equipage by the inhabitants of Kemberling—was furnished for Captain Arundel's accommodation by the proprietor of the Black Bull; and once more the soldier approached that ill-omened dwelling-place which had been the home of his wife.

He was ushered without any delay to the study in which Olivia spent the greater part of her time·

The dusky afternoon was already closing in. A low fire burned in the old-fashioned grate, and one lighted wax-candle stood upon an open davenport, before which the widow sat amid a confusion of torn papers, cast upon the ground about her.

The open drawers of the davenport, the littered scraps of paper and loosely-tied documents, thrust, without any show of order, into the different compartments of the desk, bore testimony to that state of mental distraction which had been common to Olivia Marchmont for some time past. She herself, the gloomy tenant of the Towers, sat with her elbow resting on her desk, looking hopelessly and absently at the confusion before her.

"I am very tired," she said, with a sigh, as she motioned her cousin to a chair. "I have been trying to sort my papers, and to look for bills that have to be paid, and receipts. They come to me about everything. I am very tired."

Her manner was changed from that stern defiance with which she had last confronted her kinsman to an air of almost piteous feebleness. She rested her head on her hand, repeating, in a low voice,

"Yes, I am very tired."

Edward Arundel looked earnestly at her faded face, so faded from that which he remembered it in its proud young beauty, that, in spite of his doubt of this woman, he could scarcely refrain from some touch of pity for her.

"You are ill, Olivia," he said.

"Yes, I am ill; I am worn out; I am tired of my life. Why does not God have pity upon me, and take the bitter burden away? I have carried it too long."

She said this not so much to her cousin as to herself. She was like Job in his despair, and cried aloud to the Supreme Himself in a gloomy protest against her anguish.

"Olivia," said Edward Arundel very earnestly, "what is it that makes you unhappy? Is the burden that you carry a burden on your conscience? Is the black shadow upon your life a guilty secret? Is the cause of your unhappiness that which I suspect it to be? Is it that, in some hour of passion, you consented to league yourself with Paul Marchmont against my poor innocent girl? For pity's sake, speak, and undo what you have done. You cannot have been guilty of a crime. There has been some foul play, some conspiracy, some suppression; and my darling has

been lured away by the machinations of this man. But he could not have got her into his power without your help. You hated her,—Heaven alone knows for what reason,—and in an evil hour you helped him, and now you are sorry for what you have done. But it is not too late, Olivia; Olivia, it is surely not too late. Speak, speak, woman, and undo what you have done. As you hope for mercy and forgiveness from God, undo what you have done. I will exact no atonement from you. Paul Marchmont, this smooth traitor, this frank man of the world, who defied me with a smile,—he only shall be called upon to answer for the wrong done against my darling. Speak, Olivia, for pity's sake," cried the young man, casting himself upon his knees at his cousin's feet. "You are of my own blood; you must have some spark of regard for me; have compassion upon me, then, or have compassion upon your own guilty soul, which must perish everlastingly if you withhold the truth. Have pity, Olivia, and speak!"

The widow had risen to her feet, recoiling from the soldier as he knelt before her, and looking at him with an awful light in the eyes that alone gave life to her corpse-like face.

Suddenly she flung her arms up above her head, stretching her wasted hands towards the ceiling.

"By the God who has renounced and abandoned me," she cried, "I have no more knowledge than you have of Mary Marchmont's fate. From the hour in which she left this house, upon the 17th of October, until this present moment, I have neither seen her nor heard of her. If I have lied to you, Edward Arundel," she added, dropping her extended arms, and turning quietly to her cousin, —"if I have lied to you in saying this, may the tortures which I suffer be doubled to me,—if in the infinite of suffering there is any anguish worse than that I now endure."

Edward Arundel paused for a little while, brooding over this strange reply to his appeal. Could he disbelieve his cousin?

It is common to some people to make forcible and impious asseverations of an untruth shamelessly, in the very face of an insulted Heaven. But Olivia Marchmont was a woman who, in the very darkest hour of her despair, knew no wavering from her faith in the God she had offended.

"I cannot refuse to believe you, Olivia," Captain Arundel said presently. "I do believe in

your solemn protestations, and I no longer look for help from you in my search for my lost love. I absolve you from all suspicion of being aware of her fate *after* she left this house. But so long as she remained beneath this roof she was in your care, and I hold you responsible for the ills that may have then befallen her. You, Olivia, must have had some hand in driving that unhappy girl away from her home."

The widow had resumed her seat by the open davenport. She sat with her head bent, her brows contracted, her mouth fixed and rigid, her left hand trifling absently with the scattered papers before her.

"You accused me of this once before, when Mary Marchmont left this house," she said sullenly.

"And you were guilty then," answered Edward

"I cannot hold myself answerable for the actions of others. Mary Marchmont left this time, as she left before, of her own free will."

"Driven away by your cruel words."

"She must have been very weak," answered Olivia, with a sneer, "if a few harsh words were enough to drive her away from her own house."

"You deny, then, that you were guilty of

causing this poor deluded child's flight from this house?"

Olivia Marchmont sat for some moments in moody silence; then suddenly raising her head, she looked her cousin full in the face.

"I do," she exclaimed; "if any one except herself is guilty of an act which was her own, I am not that person."

"I understand," said Edward Arundel; "it was Paul Marchmont's hand that drove her out upon the dreary world. It was Paul Marchmont's brain that plotted against her. You were only a minor instrument; a willing tool, in the hands of a subtle villain. But he shall answer; he shall answer!"

The soldier spoke the last words between his clenched teeth. Then with his chin upon his breast, he sat thinking over what he had just heard.

"How was it?" he muttered; "how was it? He is too consummate a villain to use violence. His manner the other morning told me that the law was on his side. He had done nothing to put himself into my power, and he defied me. How was it, then? By what means did he drive my darling to her despairing flight?"

As Captain Arundel sat thinking of these

things, his cousin's idle fingers still trifled with the papers on the desk; while, with her chin resting on her other hand, and her eyes fixed upon the wall before her, she stared blankly at the reflection of the flame of the candle on the polished oaken panel. Her idle fingers, following no design, strayed here and there among the scattered papers, until a few that lay nearest the edge of the desk slid off the smooth morocco, and fluttered to the ground.

Edward Arundel, as absent-minded as his cousin, stooped involuntarily to pick up the papers. The uppermost of those that had fallen was a slip cut from a country newspaper, to which was pinned an open letter, a few lines only. The paragraph in the newspaper slip was marked by double ink-lines, drawn round it by a neat penman. Again almost involuntarily, Edward Arundel looked at this marked paragraph. It was very brief:

"We regret to be called upon to state that another of the sufferers in the accident which occurred last August on the South-Western Railway has expired from injuries received upon that occasion. Captain Arundel, of the H.E.I.C.S., died on Friday night at Dangerfield Park, Devon, the seat of his elder brother."

The letter was almost as brief as the paragraph:

Kemberling, October 17th.

"My dear Mrs. Marchmont,—The enclosed has just come to hand. Let us hope it is not true. But, in case of the worst, it should be shown to Miss Marchmont *immediately.* Better that she should hear the news from you than from a stranger.

"Yours sincerely,

"Paul Marchmont."

"I understand everything now," said Edward Arundel, laying these two papers before his cousin; "it was with this printed lie that you and Paul Marchmont drove my wife to despair—perhaps to death. My darling, my darling," cried the young man, in a burst of uncontrollable agony, "I refused to believe that you were dead; I refused to believe that you were lost to me. I can believe it now; I can believe it now."

CHAPTER XI.

EDWARD ARUNDEL'S DESPAIR.

YES; Edward Arundel could believe the worst now. He could believe now that his young wife, on hearing tidings of his death, had rushed madly to her own destruction; too desolate, too utterly unfriended and miserable, to live under the burden of her sorrows.

Mary had talked to her husband in the happy, loving confidence of her bright honeymoon; she had talked to him of her father's death, and the horrible grief she had felt; the heart-sickness, the eager yearning to be carried to the same grave, to rest in the same silent sleep.

"I think I tried to throw myself from the window upon the night before papa's funeral," she had said; "but I fainted away. I know it was very wicked of me. But I was mad. My wretchedness had driven me mad."

He remembered this. Might not this girl, this

helpless child, in the first desperation of her grief, have hurried down to that dismal river, to hide her sorrows for ever under its slow and murky tide?

Henceforward it was with a new feeling that Edward Arundel looked for his missing wife. The young and hopeful spirit which had wrestled against conviction, which had stubbornly preserved its own sanguine fancies against the gloomy forebodings of others, had broken down before the evidence of that false paragraph in the country newspaper. That paragraph was the key to the sad mystery of Mary Arundel's disappearance. Her husband could understand now why she ran away, why she despaired; and how, in that desperation and despair, she might have hastily ended her short life.

It was with altered feelings, therefore, that he went forth to look for her. He was no longer passionate and impatient, for he no longer believed that his young wife lived to yearn for his coming, and to suffer for the want of his protection; he no longer thought of her as a lonely and helpless wanderer driven from her rightful home, and in her childish ignorance straying farther and farther away from him who had the right to

succour and to comfort her. No; he thought of her now with sullen despair at his heart; he thought of her now in utter hopelessness; he thought of her with a bitter and agonising regret, which we only feel for the dead.

But this grief was not the only feeling that held possession of the young soldier's breast. Stronger even than his sorrow was his eager yearning for vengeance, his savage desire for retaliation.

"I look upon Paul Marchmont as the murderer of my wife," he said to Olivia, on that November evening on which he saw the paragraph in the newspaper; "I look upon that man as the deliberate destroyer of a helpless girl; and he shall answer to me for her life. He shall answer to me for every pang she suffered, for every tear she shed. God have mercy upon her poor erring soul, and help me to my vengeance upon her destroyer."

He lifted his eyes to heaven as he spoke, and a solemn shadow overspread his pale face, like a dark cloud upon a winter landscape.

I have said that Edward Arundel no longer felt a frantic impatience to discover his wife's fate. The sorrowful conviction which at last had forced

itself upon him left no room for impatience. The pale face he had loved was lying hidden somewhere beneath those dismal waters. He had no doubt of that. There was no need of any other solution to the mystery of his wife's disappearance. That which he had to seek for was the evidence of Paul Marchmont's guilt.

The outspoken young soldier, whose nature was as transparent as the stainless soul of a child, had to enter into the lists with a man who was so different from himself, that it was almost difficult to believe the two individuals belonged to the same species.

Captain Arundel went back to London, and betook himself forthwith to the office of Messrs Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson. He had the idea, common to many of his class, that all lawyers, whatever claims they might have to respectability, are in a manner past-masters in every villanous art; and, as such, the proper people to deal with a villain.

"'Richard Paulette will be able to help me," thought the young man; "Richard Paulette saw through Paul Marchmont, I dare say."

But Richard Paulette had very little to say about the matter. He had known Edward Arun-

del's father, and he had known the young soldier from his early boyhood, and he seemed deeply grieved to witness his client's distress; but he had nothing to say against Paul Marchmont.

"I cannot see what right you have to suspect Mr. Marchmont of any guilty share in your wife's disappearance," he said. "Do not think I defend him because he is our client. You know that we are rich enough, and honourable enough, to refuse the business of any man whom we thought a villain. When I was in Lincolnshire, Mr. Marchmont did everything that a man could do to testify his anxiety to find his cousin.

"Oh, yes," Edward Arundel answered bitterly; "that is only consistent with the man's diabolical artifice; *that* was a part of his scheme. He wished to testify that anxiety, and he wanted you as a witness to his conscientious search after my—poor—lost girl." His voice and manner changed for a moment as he spoke of Mary.

Richard Paulette shook his head.

"Prejudice, prejudice, my dear Arundel," he said; "this is all prejudice upon your part, I assure you. Mr. Marchmont behaved with perfect honesty and candour. 'I won't tell you that I'm sorry to inherit this fortune,' he said, 'because if

I did you wouldn't believe me—what man in his senses *could* believe that a poor devil of a landscape painter would regret coming into eleven thousand a year?—but I am very sorry for this poor little girl's unhappy fate.' And I believe," added Mr. Paulette, decisively, "that the man was heartily sorry."

Edward Arundel groaned aloud.

"O God! this is too terrible," he muttered. "Everybody will believe in this man rather than in me. How am I to be avenged upon the wretch who caused my darling's death?"

He talked for a long time to the lawyer, but with no result. Richard Paulette considered the young man's hatred of Paul Marchmont only a natural consequence of his grief for Mary's death.

"I can't wonder that you are prejudiced against Mr. Marchmont," he said; "it's natural; it's only natural; but, believe me, you are wrong. Nothing could be more straightforward, and even delicate, than his conduct. He refuses to take possession of the estate, or to touch a farthing of the rents. 'No,' he said, when I suggested to him that he had a right to enter in possession,—'no; we will not shut the door against hope. My cousin may be hiding herself somewhere; she

may return by-and-by. Let us wait a twelvemonth. If, at the end of that time, she does not return, and if in the interim we receive no tidings from her, no evidence of her existence, we may reasonably conclude that she is dead; and I may fairly consider myself the rightful owner of Marchmont Towers. In the mean time, you will act as if you were still Mary Marchmont's agent, holding all moneys as in trust for her, but to be delivered up to me at the expiration of a year from the day on which she disappeared.' I do not think anything could be more straightforward than that," added Richard Paulette, in conclusion.

"No," Edward answered, with a sigh; "it *seems* very straightforward. But the man who could strike at a helpless girl by means of a lying paragraph in a newspaper—"

"Mr. Marchmont may have believed in that paragraph."

Edward Arundel rose, with a gesture of impatience.

"I came to you for help, Mr. Paulette," he said; "but I see you don't mean to help me. Good day."

He left the office before the lawyer could remonstrate with him. He walked away, with

passionate anger against all the world raging in his breast.

"Why, what a smooth-spoken, false-tongued world it is!" he thought. "Let a man succeed in the vilest scheme, and no living creature will care to ask by what foul means he may have won his success. What weapons can I use against this Paul Marchmont, who twists truth and honesty to his own ends, and masks his basest treachery under an appearance of candour?"

From Lincoln's Inn Fields Captain Arundel drove over Waterloo Bridge to Oakley Street. He went to Mrs. Pimpernel's establishment, without any hope of the glad surprise that had met him there a few months before. He believed implicitly that his wife was dead, and wherever he went in search of her he went in utter hopelessness, only prompted by the desire to leave no part of his duty undone.

The honest-hearted dealer in cast-off apparel wept bitterly when she heard how sadly the Captain's honeymoon had ended. She would have been content to detain the young soldier all day, while she bemoaned the misfortunes that had come upon him; and now, for the first time, Edward heard of dismal forebodings, and horrible

dreams, and unaccountable presentiments of evil, with which this honest woman had been afflicted on and before his wedding-day, and of which she had made special mention at the time to divers friends and acquaintances.

"I never shall forget how shivery-like I felt as the cab drove off, with that pore dear a-lookin' and smilin' at me out of the winder. I says to Mrs. Polson, as her husband is in the shoemakin' line, two doors further down,—I says, 'I do hope Capting Harungdell's lady will get safe to the end of her journey.' I felt the cold shivers a-creepin' up my back just azackly like I did a fortnight before my pore Jane died, and I couldn't get it off my mind as somethink was goin' to happen."

From London Captain Arundel went to Winchester, much to the disgust of his valet, who was accustomed to a luxuriously idle life at Dangerfield Park, and who did not by any means relish this desultory wandering from place to place. Perhaps there was some faint ray of hope in the young man's mind, as he drew near to that little village-inn beneath whose shelter he had been so happy with his childish bride. If she had *not* committed suicide; if she had indeed wandered away, to try and bear her sorrows in

gentle Christian resignation; if she had sought some retreat where she might be safe from her tormentors,—would not every instinct of her loving heart have led her here?—here, amid these low meadows and winding streams, guarded and surrounded by the pleasant shelter of grassy hill-tops, crowned by waving trees?—here, where she had been so happy with the husband of her choice?

But, alas! that newly-born hope, which had made the soldier's heart beat and his cheek flush, was as delusive as many other hopes that lure men and women onward in their weary wanderings upon this earth. The landlord of the White Hart Inn answered Edward Arundel's question with stolid indifference.

No; the young lady had gone away with her ma, and a gentleman who came with her ma. She had cried a deal, poor thing, and had seemed very much cut up. (It was from the chambermaid Edward heard this.) But her ma and the gentleman had seemed in a great hurry to take her away. The gentleman said that a village inn wasn't the place for her, and he said he was very much shocked to find her there; and he had a fly got ready, and took the two ladies away in it

to the George, at Winchester, and they were to go from there to London; and the young lady was crying when she went away, and was as pale as death, poor dear.

This was all that Captain Arundel gained by his journey to Milldale. He went across country to the farming people near Reading, his wife's poor relations. But they had heard nothing of her. They had wondered, indeed, at having no letters from her, for she had been very kind to them. They were terribly distressed when they were told of her disappearance.

This was the forlorn hope. It was all over now. Edward Arundel could no longer struggle against the cruel truth. He could do nothing now but avenge his wife's sorrows. He went down to Devonshire, saw his mother, and told her the sad story of Mary's flight. But he could not rest at Dangerfield, though Mrs. Arundel implored him to stay long enough to recruit his shattered health. He hurried back to London, made arrangements with his agent for being bought out of his regiment by his brother officers, and then, turning his back upon the career that had been far dearer to him than his life, he went down to Lincolnshire once more, in the dreary

winter weather, to watch and wait patiently, if need were, for the day of retribution.

There was a detached cottage, a lonely place enough, between Kemberling and Marchmont Towers, that had been to let for a long time, being very much out of repair, and by no means inviting in appearance. Edward Arundel took this cottage. All necessary repairs and alterations were executed under the direction of Mr. Morrison, who was to remain permanently in the young man's service. Captain Arundel had a couple of horses brought down to his new stable, and hired a country lad, who was to act as groom under the eye of the factotum. Mr. Morrison and this lad, with one female servant, formed Edward's establishment.

Paul Marchmont lifted his auburn eyebrows when he heard of the new tenant of Kemberling Retreat. The lonely cottage had been christened Kemberling Retreat by a sentimental tenant; who had ultimately levanted, leaving his rent three quarters in arrear. The artist exhibited a gentlemanly surprise at this new vagary of Edward Arundel's, and publicly expressed his pity for the foolish young man.

"I am so sorry that the poor fellow should

sacrifice himself to a romantic grief for my unfortunate cousin," Mr. Marchmont said, in the parlour of the Black Bull, where he condescended to drop in now and then with his brother-in-law, and to make himself popular amongst the magnates of Kemberling, and the tenant-farmers, who looked to him as their future, if not their actual, landlord. "I am really sorry for the poor lad. He's a handsome, high-spirited fellow, and I'm sorry he's been so weak as to ruin his prospects in the Company's service. Yes; I am heartily sorry for him."

Mr. Marchmont discussed the matter very lightly in the parlour of the Black Bull, but he kept silence as he walked home with the surgeon; and Mr. George Weston, looking askance at his brother-in-law's face, saw that something was wrong, and thought it advisable to hold his peace.

Paul Marchmont sat up late that night talking to Lavinia after the surgeon had gone to bed. The brother and sister conversed in subdued murmurs as they stood close together before the expiring fire, and the faces of both were very grave, indeed, almost apprehensive.

"He must be terribly in earnest," Paul Marchmont said, "or he would never have sacrificed his

position. He has planted himself here, close upon us, with a determination of watching us. We shall have to be very careful."

It was early in the new year that Edward Arundel completed all his arrangements, and took possession of Kemberling Retreat. He knew that, in retiring from the East India Company's service, he had sacrificed the prospect of a brilliant and glorious career, under some of the finest soldiers who ever fought for their country. But he had made this sacrifice willingly—as an offering to the memory of his lost love; as an atonement for his broken trust. For it was one of his most bitter miseries to remember that his own want of prudence had been the first cause of all Mary's sorrows. Had he confided in his mother, —had he induced her to return from Germany to be present at his marriage, and to accept the orphan girl as a daughter,—Mary need never again have fallen into the power of Olivia Marchmont. His own imprudence, his own rashness, had flung this poor child, helpless and friendless, into the hands of the very man against whom John Marchmont had written a solemn warning, —a warning that it should have been Edward's

duty to remember. But who could have calculated upon the railway accident; and who could have foreseen a separation in the first blush of the honeymoon? Edward Arundel had trusted in his own power to protect his bride from every ill that might assail her. In the pride of his youth and strength he had forgotten that he was not immortal, and the last idea that could have entered his mind was the thought that he should be stricken down by a sudden calamity, and rendered even more helpless than the girl he had sworn to shield and succour.

The bleak winter crept slowly past, and the shrill March winds were loud amidst the leafless trees in the wood behind Marchmont Towers. This wood was open to any foot-passenger who might choose to wander that way; and Edward Arundel often walked upon the bank of the slow river, and past the boat-house, beneath whose shadow he had wooed his young wife in the bright summer that was gone. The place had a mournful attraction for the young man, by reason of the memory of the past, and a different and far keener fascination in the fact of Paul Marchmont's frequent occupation of his roughly-built painting-room.

In a purposeless and unsettled frame of mind, Edward Arundel kept watch upon the man he hated, scarcely knowing why he watched, or for what he hoped, but with a vague belief that something would be discovered; that some accident might come to pass which would enable him to say to Paul Marchmont,

"It was by your treachery my wife perished; and it is you who must answer to me for her death."

Edward Arundel had seen nothing of his cousin Olivia during that dismal winter. He had held himself aloof from the Towers,—that is to say, he had never presented himself there as a guest, though he had been often on horseback and on foot in the wood by the river. He had not seen Olivia, but he had heard of her through his valet, Mr. Morrison, who insisted on repeating the gossip of Kemberling for the benefit of his listless and indifferent master.

"They do say as Mr. Paul Marchmont is going to marry Mrs. John Marchmont, sir," Mr. Morrison said, delighted at the importance of his information. "They say as Mr. Paul is always up at the Towers visitin' Mrs. John, and that she takes his advice about everything as she

does, and that she's quite wrapped up in him like."

Edward Arundel looked at his attendant with unmitigated surprise.

"My cousin Olivia marry Paul Marchmont!" he exclaimed. "You should be wiser than to listen to such foolish gossip, Morrison. You know what country people are, and you know they can't keep their tongues quiet."

Mr. Morrison took this reproach as a compliment to his superior intelligence.

"It ain't oftentimes as I listens to their talk, sir," he said; "but if I've heard this said once I've heard it twenty times; and I've heard it at the Black Bull, too, Mr. Edward, where Mr. Marchmont fre*quents* sometimes with his sister's husband; and the landlord told me as it had been spoken of once before his face, and he didn't deny it."

Edward Arundel pondered gravely over this gossip of the Kemberling people. It was not so very improbable, perhaps, after all. Olivia only held Marchmont Towers on sufferance. It might be that, rather than be turned out of her stately home, she would accept the hand of its rightful owner. She would marry Paul Marchmont, per-

haps, as she had married his brother,—for the sake of a fortune and a position. She had grudged Mary her wealth, and now she sought to become a sharer in that wealth.

"Oh, the villany, the villany!" cried the soldier. "It is all one base fabric of treachery and wrong. A marriage between these two will be only a part of the scheme. Between them they have driven my darling to her death, and they will now divide the profits of their guilty work."

The young man determined to discover whether there had been any foundation for the Kemberling gossip. He had not seen his cousin since the day of his discovery of the paragraph in the newspaper, and he went forthwith to the Towers, bent on asking Olivia the straight question as to the truth of the reports that had reached his ears.

He walked over to the dreary mansion. He had regained his strength by this time, and he had recovered his good looks; but something of the brightness of his youth was gone; something of the golden glory of his beauty had faded. He was no longer the young Apollo, fresh and radiant with the divinity of the skies. He had suffered; and suffering had left its traces on his countenance. That smiling hopefulness, that supreme

confidence in a bright future, which is the virginity of beauty, had perished beneath the withering influence of affliction.

Mrs. Marchmont was not to be seen at the Towers. She had gone down to the boat-house with Mr. Paul Marchmont and Mrs. Weston, the servant said.

"I will see them together," Edward Arundel thought. "I will see if my cousin dares to tell me that she means to marry this man."

He walked through the wood to the lonely building by the river. The March winds were blowing among the leafless trees, ruffling the black pools of water that the rain had left in every hollow; the smoke from the chimney of Paul Marchmont's painting-room struggled hopelessly against the wind, and was beaten back upon the roof from which it tried to rise. Everything succumbed before that pitiless north-easter.

Edward Arundel knocked at the door of the wooden edifice erected by his foe. He scarcely waited for the answer to his summons, but lifted the latch, and walked across the threshold, uninvited, unwelcome.

There were four people in the painting-room. Two or three seemed to have been talking together

when Edward knocked at the door; but the speakers had stopped simultaneously and abruptly, and there was a dead silence when he entered.

Olivia Marchmont was standing under the broad northern window; the artist was sitting upon one of the steps leading up to the pavilion; and a few paces from him, in an old cane-chair near the easel, sat George Weston, the surgeon, with his wife leaning over the back of his chair. It was at this man that Edward Arundel looked longest, riveted by the strange expression of his face. The traces of intense agitation have a peculiar force when seen in a usually stolid countenance. Your mobile faces are apt to give an exaggerated record of emotion. We grow accustomed to their changeful expression, their vivid betrayal of every passing sensation. But this man's was one of those faces which are only changed from their apathetic stillness by some moral earthquake, whose shock arouses the most impenetrable dullard from his stupid imperturbability. Such a shock had lately affected George Weston, the quiet surgeon of Kemberling, the submissive husband of Paul Marchmont's sister. His face was as white as death; a slow trembling shook his ponderous frame; with one of his big

fat hands he pulled a cotton handkerchief from his pocket, and tremulously wiped the perspiration from his bald forehead. His wife bent over him, and whispered a few words in his ear; but he shook his head with a piteous gesture, as if to testify his inability to comprehend her. It was impossible for a man to betray more obvious signs of violent agitation than this man betrayed.

"It's no use, Lavinia," he murmured hopelessly, as his wife whispered to him for the second time; "it's no use, my dear; I can't get over it."

Mrs. Weston cast one rapid, half-despairing, half-appealing glance at her brother, and in the next moment recovered herself, by an effort only such as great women, or wicked women, are capable of.

"Oh, you men!" she cried, in her liveliest voice; "oh, you men! What big silly babies, what nervous creatures you are! Come, George, I won't have you giving way to this foolish nonsense, just because an extra glass or so of Mrs. Marchmont's very fine old port has happened to disagree with you. You must not think we are a drunkard, Mr. Arundel," added the lady, turning playfully to Edward, and patting her husband's

clumsy shoulder as she spoke; "we are only a poor village surgeon, with a limited income, and a very weak head, and quite unaccustomed to old light port. Come, Mr. George Weston, walk out into the open air, sir, and let us see if the March wind will bring you back your senses."

And without another word Lavinia Weston hustled her husband, who walked like a man in a dream, out of the painting-room, and closed the door behind her.

Paul Marchmont laughed as the door shut upon his brother-in-law.

"Poor George!" he said, carelessly; "I thought he helped himself to the port a little too liberally. He never could stand a glass of wine; and he's the most stupid creature when he is drunk."

Excellent as all this by-play was, Edward Arundel was not deceived by it.

"The man was not drunk," he thought; "he was frightened. What could have happened to throw him into that state? What mystery are these people hiding amongst themselves; and what should *he* have to do with it?"

"Good evening, Captain Arundel," Paul Marchmont said. "I congratulate you on the change in your appearance since you were last in this

place. You seem to have quite recovered the effects of that terrible railway accident."

Edward Arundel drew himself up stiffly as the artist spoke to him.

"We cannot meet except as enemies, Mr. Marchmont," he said. "My cousin has no doubt told you what I said of you when I discovered the lying paragraph which you caused to be shown to my wife."

"I only did what any one else would have done under the circumstances," Paul Marchmont answered quietly. "I was deceived by a penny-a-liner's false report. How should I know the effect that report would have upon my unhappy cousin?"

"I cannot discuss this matter with you," cried Edward Arundel, his voice tremulous with passion; "I am almost mad when I think of it. I am not safe; I dare not trust myself. I look upon you as the deliberate assassin of a helpless girl; but so skilful an assassin, that nothing less than the vengeance of God can touch you. I cry aloud to Him night and day, in the hope that He will hear me and avenge my wife's death. I cannot look to any earthly law for help: but I trust in God; I put my trust in God."

There are very few positive and consistent atheists in this world. Mr. Paul Marchmont was a philosopher of the infidel school, a student of Voltaire and the brotherhood of the Encyclopedia, and a believer in those liberal days before the Reign of Terror, when Frenchmen, in coffee-houses, discussed the Supreme under the soubriquet of Mons. l'Etre; but he grew a little paler as Edward Arundel, with kindling eyes and uplifted hand, declared his faith in a Divine Avenger.

The sceptical artist may have thought,

"What if there should be some reality in the creed so many weak fools confide in? What if there *is* a God who cannot abide iniquity?"

"I came here to look for you, Olivia," Edward Arundel said presently. "I want to ask you a question. Will you come into the wood with me?"

"Yes, if you wish it," Mrs. Marchmont answered quietly.

The cousins went out of the painting-room together, leaving Paul Marchmont alone. They walked on for a few yards in silence.

"What is the question you came here to ask me?" Olivia asked abruptly.

"The Kémberling people have raised a report about you which I should fancy would be scarcely agreeable to yourself," answered Edward. "You would hardly wish to benefit by Mary's death, would you, Olivia?"

He looked at her searchingly as he spoke. Her face was at all times so expressive of hidden cares, of cruel mental tortures, that there was little room in her countenance for any new emotion. Her cousin looked in vain for any change in it now.

"Benefit by her death!" she exclaimed. "How should I benefit by her death?"

"By marrying the man who inherits this estate. They say you are going to marry Paul Marchmont."

Olivia looked at him with an expression of surprise.

"Do they say that of me?" she asked. "Do people say that?"

"They do. Is it true, Olivia?"

The widow turned upon him almost fiercely.

"What does it matter to you whether it is true or not? What do you care whom I marry, or what becomes of me?"

"I care this much," Edward Arundel answered,

"that I would not have your reputation lied away by the gossips of Kemberling. I should despise you if you married this man. But if you do not mean to marry him, you have no right to encourage his visits; you are trifling with your own good name. You should leave this place, and by that means give the lie to any false reports that have arisen about you."

"Leave this place!" cried Olivia Marchmont, with a bitter laugh. "Leave this place! O my God, if I could; if I could go away and bury myself somewhere at the other end of the world, and forget,—and forget!" She said this as if to herself; as if it had been a cry of despair wrung from her in despite of herself; then, turning to Edward Arundel, she added, in a quieter voice, "I can never leave this place till I leave it in my coffin. I am a prisoner here for life."

She turned from him, and walked slowly away, with her face towards the dying sunlight in the low western sky.

CHAPTER XII.

EDWARD'S VISITORS.

PERHAPS no greater sacrifice had ever been made by an English gentleman than that which Edward Arundel willingly offered up as an atonement for his broken trust, as a tribute to his lost wife. Brave, ardent, generous, and sanguine, this young soldier saw before him a brilliant career in the profession which he loved. He saw glory and distinction beckoning to him from afar, and turned his back upon those shining sirens. He gave up all, in the vague hope of, sooner or later, avenging Mary's wrongs upon Paul Marchmont.

He made no boast, even to himself, of that which he had done. Again and again memory brought back to him the day upon which he breakfasted in Oakley Street, and walked across Waterloo Bridge with the Drury Lane supernumerary. Every word that John Marchmont had spoken; every look of the meek and trust-

ing eyes, the pale and thoughtful face; every pressure of the thin hand which had grasped his in grateful affection, in friendly confidence,—came back to Edward Arundel after an interval of nearly ten years, and brought with it a bitter sense of self-reproach.

"He trusted his daughter to me," the young man thought. "Those last words in the poor fellow's letter are always in my mind: 'The only bequest which I can leave to the only friend I have is the legacy of a child's helplessness.' And I have slighted his solemn warning: and I have been false to my trust."

In his scrupulous sense of honour, the soldier reproached himself as bitterly for that imprudence, out of which so much evil had arisen, as another man might have done after a wilful betrayal of his trust. He could not forgive himself. He was for ever and ever repeating in his own mind that one brief phase which is the universal chorus of erring men's regret: "If I had acted differently, if I had done otherwise, this or that would not have come to pass." We are perpetually wandering amid the hopeless deviations of a maze, finding pitfalls and precipices, quicksands and morasses, at every turn in the

painful way; and we look back at the end of our journey to discover a straight and pleasant road-way by which, had we been wise enough to choose it, we might have travelled safely and comfortably to our destination.

But Wisdom waits for us at the goal instead of accompanying us upon our journey. She is a divinity whom we meet very late in life; when we are too near the end of our troublesome march to derive much profit from her counsels. We can only retail them to our juniors, who, not getting them from the fountain-head, have very small appreciation of their value.

The young captain of East Indian cavalry suffered very cruelly from the sacrifice which he had made. Day after day, day after day, the slow, dreary, changeless, eventless, and unbroken life dragged itself out; and nothing happened to bring him any nearer to the purpose of this monotonous existence; no promise of even ultimate success rewarded his heroic self-devotion. Afar, he heard of the rush and clamour of war, of dangers and terror, of conquest and glory. His own regiment was in the thick of the strife, his brothers in arms were doing wonders. Every mail brought some new record of triumph and glory.

The soldier's heart sickened as he read the story of each new encounter; his heart sickened with that terrible yearning,—that yearning which seems physically palpable in its perpetual pain; the yearning with which a child at a hard school, lying broad awake in the long, gloomy, rush-lit bedchamber in the dead of the silent night, remembers the soft resting-place of his mother's bosom; the yearning with which a faithful husband far away from home sighs for the presence of the wife he loves. Even with such a heart-sickness as this Edward Arundel pined to be amongst the familiar faces yonder in the East,—to hear the triumphant yell of his men as they swarmed after him through the breach in an Affghan wall,—to see the dark heathens blanch under the terror of Christian swords.

He read the records of the war again and again, again and again, till every scene arose before him,—a picture, flaming and lurid, grandly beautiful, horribly sublime. The very words of those newspaper reports seemed to blaze upon the paper on which they were written, so palpable were the images which they evoked in the soldier's mind. He was frantic in his eager impatience for the arrival of every mail, for the coming of every new

record of that Indian warfare. He was like a devourer of romances, who reads a thrilling story link by link, and who is impatient for every new chapter of the fiction. His dreams were of nothing but battle and victory, danger, triumph, and death; and he often woke in the morning exhausted by the excitement of those visionary struggles, those phantom terrors.

His sabre hung over the chimney-piece in his simple bedchamber. He took it down sometimes, and drew it from the sheath. He could have almost wept aloud over that idle sword. He raised his arm, and the weapon vibrated with a whirring noise as he swept the glittering steel in a wide circle through the empty air. An infidel's head should have been swept from his vile carcass in that rapid circle of the keen-edged blade. The soldier's arm was as strong as ever, his wrist as supple, his muscular force unwasted by mental suffering. Thank Heaven for that! But after that brief thanksgiving his arm dropped inertly, and the idle sword fell out of his relaxing grasp.

"I seem a craven to myself," he cried; "I have no right to be here—I have no right to be here while those other fellows are fighting for their lives out yonder. O God, have mercy upon me!

My brain gets dazed sometimes; and I begin to wonder whether I am most bound to remain here and watch Paul Marchmont, or to go yonder and fight for my country and my Queen."

There were many phases in this mental fever. At one time the young man was seized with a savage jealousy of the officer who had succeeded to his captaincy. He watched this man's name, and every record of his movements, and was constantly taking objection to his conduct. He was grudgingly envious of this particular officer's triumphs, however small. He could not feel generously towards this happy successor, in the bitterness of his own enforced idleness.

"What opportunities this man has!" he thought; "*I* never had such chances."

It is almost impossible for me to faithfully describe the tortures which this monotonous existence inflicted upon the impetuous young man. It is the speciality of a soldier's career that it unfits most men for any other life. They cannot throw off the old habitudes. They cannot turn from the noisy stir of war to the tame quiet of every-day life; and even when they fancy themselves wearied and worn out, and willingly retire from service, their souls are stirred by every sound of

the distant contest, as the war-steed is aroused by the blast of a trumpet. But Edward Arundel's career had been cut suddenly short at the very hour in which it was brightest with the promise of future glory. It was as if a torrent rushing madly down a mountain-side had been dammed up, and its waters bidden to stagnate upon a level plain. The rebellious waters boiled and foamed in a sullen fury. The soldier could not submit himself contentedly to his fate. He might strip off his uniform, and accept sordid coin as the price of the epaulettes he had won so dearly; but he was at heart a soldier still. When he received the sum which had been raised amongst his juniors as the price of his captaincy, it seemed to him almost as if he had sold his brother's blood.

It was summer-time now. Ten months had elapsed since his marriage with Mary Marchmont, and no new light had been thrown upon the disappearance of his young wife. No one could feel a moment's doubt as to her fate. She had perished in that lonely river which flowed behind Marchmont Towers, and far away down to the sea.

The artist had kept his word, and had as yet

taken no step towards entering into possession of the estate which he inherited by his cousin's death. But Mr. Paul Marchmont spent a great deal of time at the Towers, and a great deal more time in the painting-room by the river-side, sometimes accompanied by his sister, sometimes alone.

The Kemberling gossips had grown by no means less talkative upon the subject of Olivia and the new owner of Marchmont Towers. On the contrary, the voices that discussed Mrs. Marchmont's conduct were a great deal more numerous than heretofore; in other words, John Marchmont's widow was "talked about." Everything is said in this phrase. It was scarcely that people said bad things of her; it was rather that they talked more about her than any woman can suffer to be talked of with safety to her fair fame. They began by saying that she was going to marry Paul Marchmont; they went on to wonder *whether* she was going to marry him; then they wondered *why* she didn't marry him. From this they changed the venue, and began to wonder whether Paul Marchmont meant to marry her,—there was an essential difference in this new wonderment,—and next, why Paul Marchmont didn't marry her.

And by this time Olivia's reputation was overshadowed by a terrible cloud, which had arisen no bigger than a man's hand, in the first conjecturings of a few ignorant villagers.

People made it their business first to wonder about Mrs. Marchmont, and then to set up their own theories about her; to which theories they clung with a stupid persistence, forgetting, as people generally do forget, that there might be some hidden clue, some secret key, to the widow's conduct, for want of which the cleverest reasoning respecting her was only so much groping in the dark.

Edward Arundel heard of the cloud which shadowed his cousin's name. Her father heard of it, and went to remonstrate with her, imploring her to come to him at Swampington, and to leave Marchmont Towers to the new lord of the mansion. But she only answered him with gloomy, obstinate reiteration, and almost in the same terms as she had answered Edward Arundel; declaring that she would stay at the Towers till her death; that she would never leave the place till she was carried thence in her coffin.

Hubert Arundel, always afraid of his daughter, was more than ever afraid of her now; and he

was as powerless to contend against her sullen determination as he would have been to float up the stream of a rushing river.

So Olivia was talked about. She had scared away all visitors, after the ball at the Towers, by the strangeness of her manner and the settled gloom in her face; and she lived unvisited and alone in the gaunt stony mansion; and people said that Paul Marchmont was almost perpetually with her, and that she went to meet him in the painting-room by the river.

Edward Arundel sickened of his wearisome life, and no one helped him to endure his sufferings. His mother wrote to him imploring him to resign himself to the loss of his young wife, to return to Dangerfield, to begin a new existence, and to blot out the memory of the past.

"You have done all that the most devoted affection could prompt you to do," Mrs. Arundel wrote. "Come back to me, my dearest boy. I gave you up to the service of your country because it was my duty to resign you then. But I cannot afford to lose you now; I cannot bear to see you sacrificing yourself to a chimera. Return to me; and let me see you make a new and happier choice. Let me see my son the father of

little children who will gather round my knees when I grow old and feeble."

"A new and happier choice!" Edward Arundel repeated the words with a melancholy bitterness. "No, my poor lost girl; no, my blighted wife; I will not be false to you. The smiles of happy women can have no sunlight for me while I cherish the memory of the sad eyes that watched me when I drove away from Milldale, the sweet sorrowful face that I was never to look upon again."

The dull empty days succeeded each other, and *did* resemble each other, with a wearisome similitude that well-nigh exhausted the patience of the impetuous young man. His fiery nature chafed against this miserable delay. It was so hard to have to wait for his vengeance. Sometimes he could scarcely refrain from planting himself somewhere in Paul Marchmont's way, with the idea of a hand-to-hand struggle in which either he or his enemy must perish.

Once he wrote the artist a desperate letter, denouncing him as an arch-plotter and villain; calling upon him, if his evil nature was redeemed by one spark of manliness, to fight as men had been in the habit of fighting only a few years

before, with a hundred times less reason than these two men had for their quarrel.

"I have called you a villain and traitor; in India we fellows would kill each other for smaller words than those," wrote the soldier. "But I have no wish to take any advantage of my military experience. I may be a better shot than you. Let us have only one pistol, and draw lots for it. Let us fire at each other across a dinner-table. Let us do anything; so that we bring this miserable business to an end."

Mr. Marchmont read this letter slowly and thoughtfully, more than once; smiling as he read.

"He's getting tired," thought the artist. "Poor young man, I thought he would be the first to grow tired of this sort of work."

He wrote Edward Arundel a long letter; a friendly but rather facetious letter; such as he might have written to a child who had asked him to jump over the moon. He ridiculed the idea of a duel, as something utterly Quixotic and absurd.

"I am fifteen years older than you, my dear Mr. Arundel," he wrote, "and a great deal too old to have any inclination to fight with windmills;

or to represent the windmill which a high-spirited young Quixote may choose to mistake for a villanous knight, and run his hot head against in that delusion. I am not offended with you for calling me bad names, and I take your anger merely as a kind of romantic manner you have of showing your love for my poor cousin. We are not enemies, and we never shall be enemies; for I will never suffer myself to be so foolish as to get into a passion with a brave and generous-hearted young soldier, whose only error is an unfortunate hallucination with regard to

"Your very humble servant,

"PAUL MARCHMONT."

Edward ground his teeth with savage fury as he read this letter.

"Is there no making this man answer for his infamy?" he muttered. "Is there no way of making him suffer?"

June was nearly over, and the year was wearing round to the anniversary of Edward's wedding-day, the anniversaries of those bright days which the young bride and bridegroom had loitered away by the trout-streams in the Hampshire meadows, when some most unlooked-for

visitors made their appearance at Kemberling Retreat.

The cottage lay back behind a pleasant garden, and was hidden from the dusty high road by a hedge of lilacs and laburnums which grew within the wooden fence. It was Edward's habit, in this hot summer-time, to spend a great deal of his time in the garden; walking up and down the neglected paths, with a cigar in his mouth; or lolling in an easy chair on the lawn reading the papers. Perhaps the garden was almost prettier, by reason of the long neglect which it had suffered, than it would have been if kept in the trimmest order by the industrious hands of a skilful gardener. Everything grew in a wild and wanton luxuriance, that was very beautiful in this summer-time, when the earth was gorgeous with all manner of blossoms. Trailing branches from the espaliered apple-trees hung across the pathways, intermingled with roses that had run wild; and made "bits" that a landscape-painter might have delighted to copy. Even the weeds, which a gardener would have looked upon with horror, were beautiful. The wild convolvulus flung its tendrils into fantastic wreaths about the bushes of sweetbrier; the honeysuckle, untutored

by the pruning-knife, mixed its tall branches with seringa and clematis; the jasmine that crept about the house had mounted to the very chimney-pots, and strayed in through the open windows; even the stable-roof was half hidden by hardy monthly roses that had clambered up to the thatch. But the young soldier took very little interest in this disorderly garden. He pined to be far away in the thick jungle, or on the burning plain. He hated the quiet and repose of an existence which seemed little better than the living death of a cloister.

The sun was low in the west at the close of a long midsummer day, when Mr. Arundel strolled up and down the neglected pathways, backwards and forwards amid the long tangled grass of the lawn, smoking a cigar, and brooding over his sorrows.

He was beginning to despair. He had defied Paul Marchmont, and no good had come of his defiance. He had watched him, and there had been no result of his watching. Day after day he had wandered down to the lonely pathway by the river side; again and again he had reconnoitered the boat-house, only to hear Paul Marchmont's treble voice singing scraps out of modern

operas as he worked at his easel; or on one or two occasions to see Mr. George Weston, the surgeon, or Lavinia his wife, emerge from the artist's painting-room.

Upon one of these occasions Edward Arundel had accosted the surgeon of Kemberling, and had tried to enter into conversation with him. But Mr. Weston had exhibited such utterly hopeless stupidity, mingled with a very evident terror of his brother-in-law's foe, that Edward had been fain to abandon all hope of any assistance from this quarter.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry for you, Mr. Arundel," the surgeon said, looking, not at Edward, but about and around him, in a hopeless, wandering manner, like some hunted animal that looks far and near for a means of escape from his pursuer, —"I'm very sorry for you—and for all your trouble—and I was when I attended you at the Black Bull—and you were the first patient I ever had there—and it led to my having many more—as I may say—though that's neither here nor there. And I'm very sorry for you, and for the poor young woman too—particularly for the poor young woman—and I always tell Paul so—and—and Paul—"

And at this juncture Mr. Weston stopped abruptly, as if appalled by the hopeless entanglement of his own ideas, and with a brief "Good evening, Mr. Arundel," shot off in the direction of the Towers, leaving Edward at a loss to understand his manner.

So, on this midsummer evening, the soldier walked up and down the neglected grass-plat, thinking of the men who had been his comrades, and of the career which he had abandoned for the love of his lost wife.

He was aroused from his gloomy reverie by the sound of a fresh girlish voice calling to him by his name.

"Edward! Edward!"

Who could there be in Lincolnshire with the right to call to him thus by his Christian name? He was not long left in doubt. While he was asking himself the question, the same feminine voice cried out again.

"Edward! Edward! Will you come and open the gate for me, please? Or do you mean to keep me out here for ever?"

This time Mr. Arundel had no difficulty in recognising the familiar tones of his sister Letitia, whom he had believed, until that moment, to be

safe under the maternal wing at Dangerfield. And lo, here she was, on horseback at his own gate; with a cavalier hat and feathers overshadowing her girlish face; and with another young Amazon on a thorough-bred chestnut, and an elderly groom on a thorough-bred bay, in the background.

Edward Arundel, utterly confounded by the advent of such visitors, flung away his cigar, and went to the low wooden gate beyond which his sister's steed was pawing the dusty road, impatient of this stupid delay, and eager to be cantering stablewards through the scented summer air.

"Why, Letitia!" cried the young man, "what, in mercy's name, has brought you here?"

Miss Arundel laughed aloud at her brother's look of surprise.

"You didn't know I was in Lincolnshire, did you?" she asked; and then answered her own question in the same breath: "Of course you didn't, because I wouldn't let mamma tell you I was coming; for I wanted to surprise you, you know. And I think I have surprised you, haven't I? I never saw such a scared-looking creature in all my life. If I were a ghost coming here in the gloaming, you couldn't look more frightened than

you did just now. I only came the day before yesterday—and I'm staying at Major Lawford's, twelve miles away from here—and this is Miss Lawford, who was at school with me at Bath. You've heard me talk of Belinda Lawford, my dearest, dearest friend? Miss Lawford, my brother; my brother, Miss Lawford. Are you going to open the gate and let us in, or do you mean to keep your citadel closed upon us altogether, Mr. Edward Arundel?"

At this juncture the young lady in the background drew a little nearer to her friend, and murmured a remonstrance to the effect that it was very late, and that they were expected home before dark; but Miss Arundel refused to hear the voice of wisdom.

"Why, we've only an hour's ride back," she cried; "and if it should be dark, which I don't think it will be, for it's scarcely dark all night through at this time of year, we've got Hoskins with us, and Hoskins will take care of us. Won't you, Hoskins?" demanded the young lady, turning to the elderly groom.

Of course Hoskins declared that he was ready to achieve all that man could do or dare in the defence of his liege ladies, or something pretty

nearly to that effect; but delivered in a vile Lincolnshire patois, not easily rendered in printer's ink.

Miss Arundel waited for no further discussion, but gave her hand to her brother, and vaulted lightly from her saddle.

Then, of course, Edward Arundel offered his services to his sister's companion, and then for the first time he looked in Belinda Lawford's face, and even in that one first glance saw that she was a good and beautiful creature, and that her hair, of which she had a great quantity, was of the colour of her horse's chestnut coat; that her eyes were the bluest he had ever seen, and that her cheeks were like the neglected roses in his garden. He held out his hand to her. She took it with a frank smile, and dismounted, and came in amongst the grass-grown pathways, amid the confusion of trailing branches and bright garden-flowers growing wild.

In that moment began the second volume of Edward Arundel's life. The first volume had begun upon the Christmas-night on which the boy of seventeen went to see the pantomime at Drury Lane Theatre. The old story had been a

long, sad story, full of tenderness and pathos, but with a cruel and dismal ending. The new story began to-night, in this fading western sunshine, in this atmosphere of balmy perfume, amidst these dew-laden garden-flowers growing wild.

But, as I think I observed before at the outset of this story, we are rarely ourselves aware of the commencement of any new section in our lives. It is only after the fact that we recognise the awful importance which actions, in themselves most trivial, assume by reason of their consequences; and when the action, in itself so unimportant, in its consequences so fatal, has been in any way a deviation from the right, how bitterly we reproach ourselves for that false step!

"I am so *glad* to see you, Edward!" Miss Arundel exclaimed, as she looked about her, criticising her brother's domain; "but you don't seem a bit glad to see me, you poor gloomy old dear. And how much better you look than you did when you left Dangerfield? only a little careworn, you know, still. And to think of your coming and burying yourself here, away from all the people who love you, you silly old darling! And Belinda knows the story, and she's so sorry for

you. Ain't you, Linda? I call her Linda for short, and because it's prettier than *Be*-linda," added the young lady aside to her brother, and with a contemptuous emphasis upon the first syllable of her friend's name.

Miss Lawford, thus abruptly appealed to, blushed, and said nothing.

If Edward Arundel had been told that any other young lady was acquainted with the sad story of his married life, I think he would have been inclined to revolt against the very idea of her pity. But although he had only looked once at Belinda Lawford, that one look seemed to have told him a great deal. He felt instinctively that she was as good as she was beautiful, and that her pity must be a most genuine and tender emotion, not to be despised by the proudest man upon earth.

The two ladies seated themselves upon a dilapidated rustic bench amid the long grass, and Mr. Arundel sat in the low basket-chair in which he was wont to lounge a great deal of his time away.

"Why don't you have a gardener, Ned?" Letitia Arundel asked, after looking rather contemptuously at the flowery luxuriance around her.

Her brother shrugged his shoulders with a despondent gesture.

"Why should I take any care of the place?" he said. "I only took it because it was near the spot where—where my poor girl—where I wanted to be. I have no object in beautifying it. I wish to Heaven I could leave it, and go back to India."

He turned his face eastward as he spoke, and the two girls saw that half-eager, half-despairing yearning that was always visible in his face when he looked to the east. It was over yonder, the scene of strife, the red field of glory, only separated from him by a patch of purple ocean and a strip of yellow sand. It was yonder. He could almost feel the hot blast of the burning air. He could almost hear the shouts of victory. And he was a prisoner here, bound by a sacred duty,—by a duty which he owed to the dead.

"Major Lawford—Major Lawford is Belinda's papa; 33rd Foot—Major Lawford knew that we were coming here, and he begged me to ask you to dinner; but I said you wouldn't come, for I knew you had shut yourself out of all society—though the Major's the dearest creature, and the Grange is a most delightful place to stay at. I

was down here in the midsummer holidays once, you know, while you were in India. But I give the message as the Major gave it to me; and you are to come to dinner whenever you like."

Edward Arundel murmured a few polite words of refusal. No; he saw no society; he was in Lincolnshire to achieve a certain object; he should remain there no longer than was necessary in order for him to do so.

"And you don't even say that you're glad to see me!" exclaimed Miss Arundel, with an offended air, "though it's six months since you were last at Dangerfield! Upon my word, you're a nice brother for an unfortunate girl to waste her affections upon!"

Edward smiled faintly at his sister's complaint.

"I am very glad to see you, Letitia," he said; "very, very glad."

And indeed the young hermit could not but confess to himself that those two innocent young faces seemed to bring light and brightness with them, and to shed a certain transitory glimmer of sunshine upon the horrible gloom of his life. Mr. Morrison had come out to offer his duty to the young lady — whom he had been intimate with from a very early period of her existence, and had

carried upon his shoulder some fifteen years before —under the pretence of bringing wine for the visitors; and the stable-lad had been sent to a distant corner of the garden to search for strawberries for their refreshment. Even the solitary maid-servant had crept into the parlour fronting the lawn, and had shrouded herself behind the window-curtains, whence she could peep out at the two Amazons, and gladden her eyes with the sight of something that was happy and beautiful.

But the young ladies would not stop to drink any wine, though Mr. Morrison informed Letitia that the sherry was from the Dangerfield cellar, and had been sent to Master Edward by his ma; nor to eat any strawberries, though the stable-boy, who made the air odorous with the scent of hay and oats, brought a little heap of freshly-gathered fruit piled upon a cabbage-leaf, and surmounted by a rampant caterpillar of the woolly species. They could not stay any longer, they both declared, lest there should be terror at Lawford Grange because of their absence. So they went back to the gate, escorted by Edward and his confidential servant; and after Letitia had given her brother a kiss, which resounded almost like the report of a pistol through the still even-

ing air, the two ladies mounted their horses, and cantered away in the twilight.

"I shall come and see you again, Ned," Miss Arundel cried, as she shook the reins upon her horse's neck; "and so will Belinda—won't you, Belinda?"

Miss Lawford's reply, if she spoke at all, was quite inaudible amidst the clattering of the horses' hoofs upon the hard highroad.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE MORE SACRIFICE

LETITIA ARUNDEL kept her word, and came very often to Kemberling Retreat; sometimes on horseback, sometimes in a little pony-carriage; sometimes accompanied by Belinda Lawford, sometimes accompanied by a younger sister of Belinda's, as chestnut-haired and blue-eyed as Belinda herself, but at the school-room and bread-and-butter period of life, and not particularly interesting. Major Lawford came one day with his daughter and her friend, and Edward and the half-pay officer walked together up and down the grass-plat, smoking and talking of the Indian war, while the two girls roamed about the garden amidst the roses and butterflies, tearing the skirts of their riding-habits every now and then amongst the briers and gooseberry-bushes. It was scarcely strange after this visit that Edward Arundel should consent to accept Major Lawford's invitation to name a day

for dining at the Grange; he could not, with a very good grace, have refused. And yet—and yet—it seemed to him almost a treason against his lost love, his poor pensive Mary,—whose face, with the very look it had worn upon that last day, was ever present with him,—to mix with happy people who had never known sorrow. But he went to the Grange nevertheless, and grew more and more friendly with the Major, and walked in the gardens—which were very large and old-fashioned, but most beautifully kept—with his sister and Belinda Lawford; with Belinda Lawford, who knew his story and was sorry for him. He always remembered *that* as he looked at her bright face, whose varying expression gave perpetual evidence of a compassionate and sympathetic nature.

"If my poor darling had had this girl for a friend," he thought sometimes, "how much happier she might have been!"

I dare say there have been many lovelier women in this world than Belinda Lawford; many women whose faces, considered artistically, came nearer perfection; many noses more exquisitely chiselled, and scores of mouths bearing a closer affinity to Cupid's bow; but I doubt if any face

was ever more pleasant to look upon than the face of this blooming English maiden. She had a beauty that is sometimes wanting in perfect faces, and, lacking which, the most splendid loveliness will pall at last upon eyes that have grown weary of admiring; she had a charm for want of which the most rigidly classical profiles, the most exquisitely statuesque faces, have seemed colder and harder than the marble it was their highest merit to resemble. She had the beauty of goodness, and to admire her was to do homage to the purest and brightest attributes of womanhood. It was not only that her pretty little nose was straight and well-shaped, that her lips were rosy red, that her eyes were bluer than the summer heavens, and her chestnut hair tinged with the golden light of a setting sun; above and beyond such commonplace beauties as these, the beauties of tenderness, truth, faith, earnestness, hope and charity, were enthroned upon her broad white brow, and crowned her queen by right divine of womanly perfection. A loving and devoted daughter, an affectionate sister, a true and faithful friend, an untiring benefactress to the poor, a gentle mistress, a well-bred Christian lady; in every duty and in every position she bore out and sustained the impression which her

beauty made on the minds of those who looked upon her. She was only nineteen years of age, and no sorrow had ever altered the brightness of her nature. She lived a happy life with a father who was proud of her, and with a mother who resembled her in almost every attribute. She led a happy but a busy life, and did her duty to the poor about her as scrupulously as even Olivia had done in the old days at Swampington Rectory; but in such a genial and cheerful spirit as to win, not cold thankfulness, but heartfelt love and devotion from all who partook of her benefits.

Upon the Egyptian darkness of Edward Arundel's life this girl arose as a star, and by-and-by all the horizon brightened under her influence. The soldier had been very little in the society of women. His mother, his sister Letitia, his cousin Olivia, and John Marchmont's gentle daughter were the only women whom he had ever known in the familiar freedom of domestic intercourse; and he trusted himself in the presence of this beautiful and noble-minded girl in utter ignorance of any danger to his own peace of mind. He suffered himself to be happy at Lawford Grange; and in those quiet hours which he spent there he put away his old life, and forgot the stern

purpose that alone held him a prisoner in England.

But when he went back to his lonely dwelling-place, he reproached himself bitterly for that which he considered a treason against his love.

"What right have I to be happy amongst these people?" he thought; "what right have I to take life easily, even for an hour, while my darling lies in her unhallowed grave, and the man who drove her to her death remains unpunished? I will never go to Lawford Grange again."

It seemed, however, as if everybody, except Belinda, was in a plot against this idle soldier; for sometimes Letitia coaxed him to ride back with her after one of her visits to Kemberling Retreat, and very often the Major himself insisted, in a hearty military fashion, upon the young man's taking the empty seat in his dog-cart, to be driven over to the Grange. Edward Arundel had never once mentioned Mary's name to any member of this hospitable and friendly family. They were very good to him, and were prepared, he knew, to sympathise with him; but he could not bring himself to talk of his lost wife. The thought of that rash and desperate act which had ended her short life was too cruel to him. He would not

speak of her, because he would have had to plead excuses for that one guilty act; and her image to him was so stainless and pure, that he could not bear to plead for her as for a sinner who had need of men's pity, rather than a claim to their reverence.

"Her life had been so sinless," he cried sometimes; "and to think that it should have ended in sin! If I could forgive Paul Marchmont for all the rest—if I could forgive him for my loss of her, I would never forgive him for that."

The young widower kept silence, therefore, upon the subject which occupied so large a share of his thoughts, which was every day and every night the theme of his most earnest prayers; and Mary's name was never spoken in his presence at Lawford Grange.

But in Edward Arundel's absence the two girls sometimes talked of the sad story.

"Do you really think, Letitia, that your brother's wife committed suicide?" Belinda asked her friend.

"Oh, as for that, there can't be any doubt about it, dear," answered Miss Arundel, who was of a lively, not to say a flippant, disposition, and had no very great reverence for solemn things; "the

poor dear creature drowned herself. I think she must have been a little wrong in her head. I don't say so to Edward, you know; at least, I did say so once when he was at Dangerfield, and he flew into an awful passion, and called me hard-hearted and cruel, and all sorts of shocking things; so, of course, I have never said so since. But really, the poor dear thing's goings-on were so eccentric: first she ran away from her stepmother and went and hid herself in a horrid lodging; and then she married Edward at a nasty church in Lambeth, without so much as a wedding-dress, or a creature to give her away, or a cake, or cards, or anything Christian-like; and then she ran away again; and as her father had been a super —what's its name?—a man who carries banners in pantomimes, and all that—I dare say she'd seen Mr. Macready as Hamlet, and had Ophelia's death in her head when she ran down to the river-side and drowned herself. I'm sure it's a very sad story; and, of course, I'm awfully sorry for Edward."

The young lady said no more than this; but Belinda brooded over the story of that early marriage,—the stolen honeymoon, the sudden parting. How dearly they must have loved each other, the

young bride and bridegroom, absorbed in their own happiness, and forgetful of all the outer world! She pictured Edward Arundel's face as it must have been before care and sorrow had blotted out the brightest attribute of his beauty. She thought of him, and pitied him, with such tender sympathy, that by-and-by the thought of this young man's sorrow seemed to shut almost every idea out of her mind. She went about all her duties still, cheerfully and pleasantly, as it was her nature to do everything; but the zest with which she had performed every loving office—every act of sweet benevolence, seemed lost to her now.

Remember that she was a simple country damsel, leading a quiet life, whose peaceful course was almost as calm and eventless as the existence of a cloister; a life so quiet that a decently-written romance from the Swampington book-club was a thing to be looked forward to with impatience, to read with breathless excitement, and to brood upon afterwards for months. Was it strange, then, that this romance in real life—this sweet story of love and devotion, with its sad climax,—this story, the scene of which lay within a few miles of her home, the hero of which was her father's constant guest,—was it strange that this story, whose

saddest charm was its truth, should make a strong impression upon the mind of an innocent and unworldly woman, and that day by day and hour by hour she should, all unconsciously to herself, feel a stronger interest in the hero of the tale?

She was interested in him. Alas! the truth must be set down, even if it has to be in the plain old commonplace words. *She fell in love with him.* But love in this innocent and womanly nature was so different a sentiment to that which had raged in Olivia's stormy breast, that even she who felt it was unconscious of its gradual birth. It was not "an Adam at its birth," by-the-by. It did not leap, Minerva-like, from the brain; for I believe that love is born of the brain oftener than of the heart, being a strange compound of ideality, benevolence, and veneration. It came rather like the gradual dawning of a summer's day,—first a little patch of light far away in the east, very faint and feeble; then a slow widening of the rosy brightness; and at last a great blaze of splendour over all the width of the vast heavens. And then Miss Lawford grew more reserved in her intercourse with her friend's brother. Her frank good-nature gave place to a timid, shrinking bashfulness, that made her ten times more fascinating

than she had been before. She was so very young, and had mixed so little with the world, that she had yet to learn the comedy of life. She had yet to learn to smile when she was sorry, or to look sorrowful when she was pleased, as prudence might dictate—to blush at will, or to grow pale when it was politic to sport the lily tint. She was a natural, artless, spontaneous creature; and she was utterly powerless to conceal her emotions, or to pretend a sentiment she did not feel. She blushed rosy red when Edward Arundel spoke to her suddenly. She betrayed herself by a hundred signs; mutely confessing her love almost as artlessly as Mary had revealed her affection a twelvemonth before. But if Edward saw this, he gave no sign of having made the discovery. His voice, perhaps, grew a little lower and softer in its tone when he spoke to Belinda; but there was a sad cadence in that low voice, which was too mournful for the accent of a lover. Sometimes, when his eyes rested for a moment on the girl's blushing face, a shadow would darken his own, and a faint quiver of emotion stir his lower lip; but it is impossible to say what this emotion may have been. Belinda hoped nothing, expected nothing. I repeat, that she was unconscious of the nature of her own

feeling; and she had never for a moment thought of Edward otherwise than as a man who would go to his grave faithful to that sad love-story which had blighted the promise of his youth. She never thought of him otherwise than as Mary's constant mourner; she never hoped that time would alter his feelings or wear out his constancy; yet she loved him, notwithstanding.

All through July and August the young man visited at the Grange, and at the beginning of September Letitia Arundel went back to Dangerfield. But even then Edward was still a frequent guest at Major Lawford's; for his enthusiasm upon all military matters had made him a favourite with the old officer. But towards the end of September Mr. Arundel's visits suddenly were restricted to an occasional call upon the Major; he left off dining at the Grange; his evening rambles in the gardens with Mrs. Lawford and her blooming daughters—Belinda had no less than four blue-eyed sisters, all more or less resembling herself—ceased altogether, to the wonderment of every one in the old-fashioned country-house.

Edward Arundel shut out the new light which had dawned upon his life, and withdrew into the

darkness. He went back to the stagnant monotony, the hopeless despondency, the bitter regret of his old existence.

"While my sister was at the Grange, I had an excuse for going there," he said to himself sternly. "I have no excuse now."

But the old monotonous life was somehow or other a great deal more difficult to bear than it had been before. Nothing seemed to interest the young man now. Even the records of Indian victories were "flat, stale, and unprofitable." He wondered as he remembered with what eager impatience he had once pined for the coming of the newspapers, with what frantic haste he had devoured every syllable of the Indian news. All his old feelings seemed to have gone away, leaving nothing in his mind but a blank waste, a weary sickness of life and all belonging to it. Leaving nothing else—positively nothing? "No!" he answered, in reply to these mute questionings of his own spirit,—"no," he repeated doggedly, "nothing."

It was strange to find what a blank was left in his life by reason of his abandonment of the Grange. It seemed as if he had suddenly retired from an existence full of pleasure and delight

into the gloomy solitude of La Trappe. And yet what was it that he had lost, after all? A quiet dinner at a country-house, and an evening spent half in the leafy silence of an old-fashioned garden, half in a pleasant drawing-room amongst a group of well-bred girls, and only enlived by simple English ballads, or pensive melodies by Mendelssohn. It was not much to forego, surely. And yet Edward Arundel felt, in sacrificing these new acquaintances at the Grange to the stern purpose of his life, almost as if he had resigned a second captaincy for Mary's sake.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHILD'S VOICE IN THE PAVILION BY THE WATER.

THE year wore slowly on. Letitia Arundel wrote very long letters to her friend and confidante, Belinda Lawford, and in each letter demanded particular intelligence of her brother's doings. Had he been to the Grange? how had he looked? what had he talked about? &c., &c. But to these questions Miss Lawford could only return one monotonous reply: Mr. Arundel had not been to the Grange; or Mr. Arundel had called on papa one morning, but had only stayed a quarter of an hour, and had not been seen by any female member of the family.

The year wore slowly on. Edward endured his self-appointed solitude, and waited, waited, with a vengeful hatred for ever brooding in his breast, for the day of retribution. The year wore on, and the anniversary of the day upon which

Mary ran away from the Towers, the 17th of October, came at last.

Paul Marchmont had declared his intention of taking possession of the Towers upon the day following this. The twelvemonth's probation which he had imposed upon himself had expired; every voice was loud in praise of his conscientious and honourable conduct. He had grown very popular during his residence at Kemberling. Tenant farmers looked forward to halcyon days under his dominion; to leases renewed on favourable terms; to repairs liberally executed; to everything that is delightful between landlord and tenant. Edward Arundel heard all this through his faithful servitor, Mr. Morrison, and chafed bitterly at the news. This traitor was to be happy and prosperous, and to have the good word of honest men; while Mary lay in her unhallowed grave, and people shrugged their shoulders, half compassionately, half contemptuously, as they spoke of the mad heiress who had committed suicide.

Mr. Morrison brought his master tidings of all Paul Marchmont's doings about this time. He was to take possession of the Towers on the 19th. He had already made several alterations

in the arrangement of the different rooms. He had ordered new furniture from Swampington, —another man would have ordered it from London; but Mr. Marchmont was bent upon being popular, and did not despise even the good opinion of a local tradesman,—and by several other acts, insignificant enough in themselves, had asserted his ownership of the mansion which had been the airy castle of Mary Marchmont's day-dreams ten years before.

The coming-in of the new master of Marchmont Towers was to be, take it altogether, a very grand affair. The Chorley-Castle foxhounds were to meet at eleven o'clock, upon the great grass-flat, or lawn, as it was popularly called, before the western front. The county gentry from far and near had been invited to a hunting breakfast. Open house was to be kept all day for rich and poor. Every male inhabitant of the district who could muster anything in the way of a mount was likely to join the friendly gathering. Poor Reynard is decidedly England's most powerful leveller. All differences of rank and station, all distinctions which Mammon raises in every other quarter, melt away before the friendly contact of the hunting-field. The man who rides best is the

best man; and the young butcher who makes light of sunk fences, and skims, bird-like, over bullfinches and timber, may hold his own with the dandy heir to half the country-side. The cook at Marchmont Towers had enough to do to prepare for this great day. It was the first meet of the season, and in itself a solemn festival. Paul Marchmont knew this; and though the Cockney artist of Fitzroy Square knew about as much of fox-hunting as he did of the source of the Nile, he seized upon the opportunity of making himself popular, and determined to give such a hunting-breakfast as had never been given within the walls of Marchmont Towers since the time of a certain rackety Hugh Marchmont, who had drunk himself to death early in the reign of George III. He spent the morning of the 17th in the steward's room, looking through the cellar-book with the old butler, selecting the wines that were to be drunk the following day, and planning the arrangements for the mass of visitors, who were to be entertained in the great stone entrance-hall, in the kitchens, in the housekeeper's room, in the servants' hall, in almost every chamber that afforded accommodation for a guest.

"You will take care that people get placed

according to their rank," Paul said to the grey-haired servant. "You know everybody about here, I dare say, and will be able to manage so that we may give no offence."

The gentry were to breakfast in the long dining-room and in the western drawing-room. Sparkling hocks and Burgundies, fragrant Moselles, champagnes of choicest brand and rarest bouquet, were to flow like water for the benefit of the country gentlemen who should come to do honour to Paul Marchmont's installation. Great cases of comestibles had been sent by rail from Fortnum and Mason's; and the science of the cook at the Towers had been taxed to the utmost, in the struggles which she made to prove herself equal to the occasion. Twenty-one casks of ale, every cask containing twenty-one gallons, had been brewed long ago, at the birth of Arthur Marchmont, and had been laid in the cellar ever since, waiting for the majority of the young heir who was never to come of age. This very ale, with a certain sense of triumph, Paul Marchmont ordered to be brought forth for the refreshment of the commoners.

"Poor young Arthur!" he thought, after he had given this order. "I saw him once when he

was a pretty boy with fair ringlets, dressed in a suit of black velvet. His father brought him to my studio one day, when he came to patronise me and buy a picture of me,—out of sheer charity, of course, for he cared as much for pictures as I care for foxhounds. *I* was a poor relation then, and never thought to see the inside of Marchmont Towers. It was a lucky September morning that swept that bright-faced boy out of my pathway, and left only sickly John Marchmont and his daughter between me and fortune."

Yes; Mr. Paul Marchmont's year of probation was past. He had asserted himself to Messrs. Paulette, Paulette, and Mathewson, and before the face of all Lincolnshire, in the character of an honourable and high-minded man; slow to seize upon the fortune that had fallen to him, conscientious, punctilious, generous, and unselfish. He had done all this; and now the trial was over, and the day of triumph had come.

There has been a race of villains of late years very popular with the novel-writer and the dramatist, but not, I think, quite indigenous to this honest British soil; a race of pale-faced, dark-eyed, and all-accomplished scoundrels, whose chiefest attribute is imperturbability. The im-

perturbable villain has been guilty of every iniquity in the black catalogue of crimes; but he has never been guilty of an emotion. He wins a million of money at *trente et quarante*, to the terror and astonishment of all Homburg; and by not so much as one twinkle of his eye or one quiver of his lip does that imperturbable creature betray a sentiment of satisfaction. Ruin or glory, shame or triumph, defeat, disgrace, or death,—all are alike to the callous ruffian of the Anglo-Gallic novel. He smiles, and murders while he smiles, and smiles while he murders. He kills his adversary, unfairly, in a duel, and wipes his sword on a cambric handkerchief; and withal he is so elegant, so fascinating, and so handsome, that the young hero of the novel has a very poor chance against him; and the reader can scarcely help being sorry when retribution comes with the last chapter, and some crushing catastrophe annihilates the well-bred scoundrel.

Paul Marchmont was not this sort of man. He was a hypocrite when it was essential to his own safety to practice hypocrisy; but he did not accept life as a drama, in which he was for ever to be acting a part. Life would scarcely be worth the having to any man upon such terms.

It is all very well to wear heavy plate armour, and a casque that weighs fourteen pounds or so, when we go into the thick of the fight. But to wear the armour always, to live in it, to sleep in it, to carry the ponderous protection about us for ever and ever! Safety would be too dear if purchased by such a sacrifice of all personal ease. Paul Marchmont, therefore, being a selfish and self-indulgent man, only wore his armour of hypocrisy occasionally, and when it was vitally necessary for his preservation. He had imposed upon himself a penance, and acted a part in holding back for a year from the enjoyment of a splendid fortune; and he had made this one great sacrifice in order to give the lie to Edward Arundel's vague accusations, which might have had an awkward effect upon the minds of other people, had the artist grasped too eagerly at his missing cousin's wealth. Paul Marchmont had made this sacrifice; but he did not intend to act a part all his life. He meant to enjoy himself, and to get the fullest possible benefit out of his good fortune. He meant to do this; and upon the 17th of October he made no effort to restrain his spirits, but laughed and talked joyously with whoever came in his way, winning golden opinions from

all sorts of men; for happiness is contagious, and everybody likes happy people.

Forty years of poverty is a long apprenticeship to the very hardest of masters,—an apprenticeship calculated to give the keenest possible zest to newly-acquired wealth. Paul Marchmont rejoiced in his wealth with an almost delirious sense of delight. It was his at last. At last! He had waited, and waited patiently; and at last, while his powers of enjoyment were still in their zenith, it had come. How often he had dreamed of this; how often he had dreamed of that which was to take place to-morrow! How often in his dreams he had seen the stone-built mansion, and heard the voices of the crowd doing him honour. He had felt all the pride and delight of possession, to awake suddenly in the midst of his triumph, and gnash his teeth at the remembrance of his poverty. And now the poverty was a thing to be dreamt about, and the wealth was his. He had always been a good son and a kind brother; and his mother and sister were to arrive upon the eve of his installation, and were to witness his triumph. The rooms that had been altered were those chosen by Paul for his mother and maiden sister, and the new furniture had been ordered for their

comfort. It was one of his many pleasures upon this day to inspect these apartments, to see that all his directions had been faithfully carried out, and to speculate upon the effect which these spacious and luxurious chambers would have upon the minds of Mrs. Marchmont and her daughter, newly come from shabby lodgings in Charlotte Street.

"My poor mother!" thought the artist, as he looked round the pretty sitting-room. This sitting-room opened into a noble bedchamber, beyond which there was a dressing-room. "My poor mother!" he thought; "she has suffered a long time, and she has been patient. She has never ceased to believe in me; and she will see now that there was some reason for that belief. I told her long ago, when our fortunes were at the lowest ebb, when I was painting landscapes for the furniture-brokers at a pound a-piece,—I told her I was meant for something better than a tradesman's hack: and I have proved it—I have proved it."

He walked about the room, arranging the furniture with his own hands; walking a few paces backwards now and then to contemplate such and such an effect from an artistic point of view;

flinging the rich stuff of the curtains into graceful folds; admiring and examining everything, always with a smile on his face. He seemed thoroughly happy. If he had done any wrong; if by any act of treachery he had hastened Mary Arundel's death, no recollection of that foul work arose in his breast to disturb the pleasant current of his thoughts. Selfish and self-indulgent, only attached to those who were necessary to his own happiness, his thoughts rarely wandered beyond the narrow circle of his own cares or his own pleasures. He was thoroughly selfish. He could have sat at a Lord Mayor's feast with a famine-stricken population clamouring at the door of the banquet-chamber. He believed in himself as his mother and sister had believed; and he considered that he had a right to be happy and prosperous, whosoever suffered sorrow or adversity.

Upon this 17th of October Olivia Marchmont sat in the little study looking out upon the quadrangle, while the household was busied with the preparations for the festival of the following day. She was to remain at Marchmont Towers as a guest of the new master of the mansion. She would be protected from all scandal, Paul had said, by the presence of his mother and sister.

She could retain the apartments she had been accustomed to occupy; she could pursue her old mode of life. He himself was not likely to be very much at the Towers. He was going to travel and to enjoy life now that he was a rich man.

These were the arguments which Mr. Marchmont used when openly discussing the widow's residence in his house. But in a private conversation between Olivia and himself he had only said a very few words upon the subject.

"You *must* remain," he said; and Olivia submitted, obeying him with a sullen indifference that was almost like the mechanical submission of an irresponsible being.

John Marchmont's widow seemed entirely under the dominion of the new master of the Towers. It was as if the stormy passions which had arisen out of a slighted love had worn out this woman's mind, and had left her helpless to stand against the force of Paul Marchmont's keen and vigorous intellect. A remarkable change had come over Olivia's character. A dull apathy had succeeded that fiery energy of soul which had enfeebled and well-nigh worn out her body. There were no outbursts of passion now. She bore the miserable

monotony of her life uncomplainingly. Day after day, week after week, month after month, idle and apathetic, she sat in her lonely room, or wandered slowly in the grounds about the Towers. She very rarely went beyond those grounds. She was seldom seen now in her old pew at Kemberling Church; and when her father went to her and remonstrated with her for her non-attendance, she told him sullenly that she was too ill to go. She *was* ill. George Weston attended her constantly; but he found it very difficult to administer to such a sickness as hers, and he could only shake his head despondently when he felt her feeble pulse, or listened to the slow beating of her heart. Sometimes she would shut herself up in her room for a month at a time, and see no one but her faithful servant Barbara, and Mr. Weston —whom, in her utter indifference, she seemed to regard as a kind of domestic animal, whose going or coming were alike unimportant.

This stolid, silent Barbara waited upon her mistress with untiring patience. She bore with every change of Olivia's gloomy temper; she was a perpetual shield and protection to her. Even upon this day of preparation and disorder Mrs. Simmons kept guard over the pas-

sage leading to the study, and took care that no one intruded upon her mistress. At about four o'clock all Paul Marchmont's orders had been given, and the new master of the house dined for the first time by himself at the head of the long carved-oak dining-table, waited upon in solemn state by the old butler. His mother and sister were to arrive by a train that would reach Swampington at ten o'clock, and one of the carriages from the Towers was to meet them at the station. The artist had leisure in the meantime for any other business he might have to transact.

He ate his dinner slowly, thinking deeply all the time. He did not stop to drink any wine after dinner; but, as soon as the cloth was removed, rose from the table, and went straight to Olivia's room.

"I am going down to the painting-room," he said. "Will you come there presently? I want very much to say a few words to you."

Olivia was sitting near the window, with her hands lying idle in her lap. She rarely opened a book now, rarely wrote a letter, or occupied herself in any manner. She scarcely raised her eyes as she answered him.

"Yes," she said; "I will come."

"Don't be long, then. It will be dark very soon. I am not going down there to paint; I am going to fetch a landscape that I want to hang in my mother's room, and to say a few words about—".

He closed the door without stopping to finish the sentence, and went out into the quadrangle.

Ten minutes afterwards Olivia Marchmont rose, and taking a heavy woollen shawl from a chair near her, wrapped it loosely about her head and shoulders.

"I am his slave and his prisoner," she muttered to herself. "I must do as he bids me."

A cold wind was blowing in the quadrangle, and the stone pavement was wet with a drizzling rain. The sun had just gone down, and the dull autumn sky was darkening. The fallen leaves in the wood were sodden with damp, and rotted slowly on the swampy ground.

Olivia took her way mechanically along the narrow pathway leading to the river. Half-way between Marchmont Towers and the boat-house she came suddenly upon the figure of a man walking towards her through the dusk. This man was Edward Arundel.

The two cousins had not met since the March evening upon which Edward had gone to seek the widow in Paul Marchmont's painting-room. Olivia's pale face grew whiter as she recognised the soldier.

"I was coming to the house to speak to you, Mrs. Marchmont," Edward said sternly. "I am lucky in meeting you here, for I don't want any one to overhear what I've got to say."

He had turned in the direction in which Olivia had been walking; but she made a dead stop, and stood looking at him.

"You were going to the boat-house," he said. "I will go there with you."

She looked at him for a moment, as if doubtful what to do, and then said,

"Very well. You can say what you have to say to me, and then leave me. There is no sympathy between us, there is no regard between us; we are only antagonists."

"I hope not, Olivia. I hope there is some spark of regard still, in spite of all. I separate you in my own mind from Paul Marchmont. I pity you; for I believe you to be his tool."

"Is this what you have to say to me?"

"No; I came here, as your kinsman, to ask

you what you mean to do now that Paul Marchmont has taken possession of the Towers?"

"I mean to stay there."

"In spite of the gossip that your remaining will give rise to amongst these country-people!"

"In spite of everything. Mr. Marchmont wishes me to stay. It suits me to stay. What does it matter what people say of me? What do I care for any one's opinion—now?"

"Olivia," cried the young man, "are you mad?'

"Perhaps I am," she answered, coldly.

"Why is it that you shut yourself from the sympathy of those who have a right to care for you? What is the mystery of your life?"

His cousin laughed bitterly.

"Would you like to know, Edward Arundel?" she said. "You *shall* know, perhaps, some day. You have despised me all my life; you will despise me more then."

They had reached Paul Marchmont's painting-room by this time. Olivia opened the door and walked in, followed by Edward. Paul was not there. There was a picture covered with green-baize upon the easel, and the artist's hat stood upon the table amidst the litter of brushes and palettes; but the room was empty. The door

at the top of the stone steps leading to the pavilion was ajar.

"Have you anything more to say to me?" Olivia asked, turning upon her cousin as if she would have demanded why he had followed her.

"Only this: I want to know your determination; whether you will be advised by me—and by your father,—I saw my uncle Hubert this morning, and his opinion exactly coincides with mine,—or whether you mean obstinately to take your own course in defiance of everybody?"

"I do," Olivia answered. "I shall take my own course. I defy everybody. I have not been gifted with the power of winning people's affection. Other women possess that power, and trifle with it, and turn it to bad account. I have prayed, Edward Arundel,—yes, I have prayed upon my knees to the God who made me, that He would give me some poor measure of that gift which Nature has lavished upon other women; but He would not hear me, He would not hear me! I was not made to be loved. Why, then, should I make myself a slave for the sake of winning people's esteem? If they have despised me, I can despise them."

"Who has despised you, Olivia?" Edward asked, perplexed by his cousin's manner.

"YOU HAVE!" she cried, with flashing eyes; "you have! From first to last—from first to last!" She turned away from him impatiently. "Go," she said; "why should we keep up a mockery of friendliness and cousinship? We are nothing to each other."

Edward walked towards the door; but he paused upon the threshold, with his hat in his hand, undecided as to what he ought to do.

As he stood thus, perplexed and irresolute, a cry, the feeble cry of a child, sounded within the pavilion.

The young man started, and looked at his cousin. Even in the dusk he could see that her face had suddenly grown livid.

"There is a child in that place," he said pointing to the door at the top of the steps.

The cry was repeated as he spoke,—the low, complaining wail of a child. There was no other voice to be heard,—no mother's voice soothing a helpless little one. The cry of the child was followed by a dead silence.

"There is a child in that pavilion," Edward Arundel repeated.

"There is," Olivia answered.

"Whose child?"

"What does it matter to you?"

"Whose child?"

"I cannot tell you, Edward Arundel."

The soldier strode towards the steps, but before he could reach them, Olivia flung herself across his pathway.

"I will see whose child is hidden in that place," he said. "Scandalous things have been said of you, Olivia. I will know the reason of your visits to this place."

She clung about his knees, and hindered him from moving; half kneeling, half crouching on the lowest of the stone steps, she blocked his pathway, and prevented him from reaching the door of the pavilion. It had been ajar a few minutes ago; it was shut now. But Edward had not noticed this.

"No, no, no!" shrieked Olivia; "you shall trample me to death before you enter that place. You shall walk over my corpse before you cross that threshold.

The young man struggled with her for a few moments; then he suddenly flung her from him; not violently, but with a contemptuous gesture.

"You are a wicked woman, Olivia Marchmont," he said; "and it matters very little to me what you do, or what becomes of you. I know now the secret of the mystery between you and Paul Marchmont. I can guess your motive for perpetually haunting this place."

He left the solitary building by the river, and walked slowly back through the wood.

His mind—predisposed to think ill of Olivia by the dark rumours he had heard through his servant, and which had had a certain amount of influence upon him, as all scandals have, however baseless—could imagine only one solution to the mystery of a child's presence in the lonely building by the river. Outraged and indignant at the discovery he had made, he turned his back upon Marchmont Towers.

"I will stay in this hateful place no longer," he thought, as he went back to his solitary home; "but before I leave Lincolnshire the whole county shall know what I think of Paul Marchmont."

END OF VOL. II.

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